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AIRY FAIRY LILIAN

By
THE AUTHOR OF
"PHYLLIS"

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'AIRY FAIRY LILIAN'

FIRST VOLUME

'AIRY FAIRY LILIAN'

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'PHYLLIS' 'MOLLY BAWN' &c.

'Youth, I do adore thee;
Oh! my Love, my Love is young!'
The Passionate Pilgrim

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



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'AIRY FAIRY LILIAN.'

CHAPTER I.

Home, sweet Home.
Old English Song.

DOWN the broad oak staircase—through the silent hall—into the drawing-room runs Lilian, singing as she goes.

The room is deserted; through the half-closed blinds the glad sunshine is rushing, turning to gold all on which its soft touch lingers, and rendering the large, dull, handsome apartment almost comfortable.

Outside everything is bright, and warm, and genial, as should be in the heart of summer; within there is only gloom—and Lilian clad in her mourning robes. The contrast is dispiriting: there life, here death, or at least the knowledge of it. There joy, here the signs and trappings of woe.

The black gown and funereal trimmings hardly harmonise with the girl's flower-like face and the gay song that trembles on her lips. But, alas! for how short a time does our first keen sorrow last; how swiftly are our dead forgotten; how seldom does grief kill! When eight long months have flown by across her father's grave Lilian finds, sometimes to her dismay, that the hours she grieves for him form but a short part of her day.

Not that her sorrow for him, even at its freshest, was very deep; it was of the subdued and horrified rather than the passionate, de-

spairing kind. And though in truth she mourned and wept for him until her pretty eyes could hold no longer tears, still there was a mildness about her grief more suggestive of tender melancholy than any very poignant anguish.

From her the dead father could scarcely be more separated than had been the living. Naturally of a rather sedentary disposition, Archibald Chesney, on the death of the wife whom he adored, had become that most uninteresting and selfish of all things, a confirmed bookworm. He went in for study, of the abstruse and heavy order, with an ardour worthy of a better cause. His library was virtually his home; he had neither affections nor desires beyond. Devoting himself exclusively to his books, he suffered them to take entire possession of what he chose to call his heart.

At times he absolutely forgot the existence of his little three-year-old daughter; and if ever the remembrance of her did cross his mind it was but to think of her as an incubus—as another misfortune heaped upon his luckless shoulders—and to wonder, with a sigh, what he was to do with her in the future.

The child, deprived of a tender mother at so early an age, was flung, therefore, upon the tender mercies of her nurses, who alternately petted and injudiciously reproved her, until at length she bid fair to be as utterly spoiled as a child can be.

She had one companion, a boy-cousin about a year older than herself. He too was lonely and orphaned, so that the two children, making common cause, clung closely to each other, and shared, both in infancy and in early youth, their joys and sorrows. The Park had been

the boy's home ever since his parents' death, Mr. Chesney accepting him as his ward, but never afterwards troubling himself about his welfare. Indeed, he had no objection whatever to fill the Park with relations, so long as they left him undisturbed to follow his own devices.

Not that the education of these children was neglected. They had all tuition that was necessary; and Lilian, having a talent for music, learned to sing and play the piano very charmingly. She could ride, too, and sit her horse *à merveille*, and had a passion for reading—perhaps inherited. But, as novels were her principal literature, and as she had no one to regulate her choice of them, it is a matter of opinion whether she derived much benefit from them. At least she received little harm, as at seventeen she was as fresh-minded and pure-hearted a child as one might care to know.

The County, knowing her to be an heiress—though not a large one—called systematically on her every three months. Twice she had been taken to a ball by an enterprising mother with a large family of unpromising sons. But as she reached her eighteenth year her father died, and her old home, the Park, being strictly entailed on heirs male, passed from her into the hands of a distant cousin utterly unknown. This young man, another Archibald Chesney, was abroad at the time of his kinsman's death—in Egypt, or Hongkong, or Jamaica—no one exactly knew which—until after much search he was finally discovered to be in Halifax.

From thence he had written to the effect that, as he probably should not return to his native land for another six months, he hoped his cousin (if it pleased her) would continue to reside at the Park—where all the

old servants were to be kept on—until his return.

It did please his cousin; and in her old home she still reigned as queen, until after eight months she received a letter from her father's lawyer warning her of Archibald Chesney's actual arrival in London.

This letter failed in its object. Lilian either would not or could not bring herself to name the day that should part her for ever from all the old haunts and pleasant nooks she loved so well. She was not brave enough to take her 'Bradshaw' and look up the earliest train that ought to convey her away from the Park. Indeed, so utterly wanting in decency and decorum did she appear at this particular epoch of her existence that the heart of her only aunt—her father's sister—was stirred to its depths. So much so that, after mature deliberation (for old people as well as great

ones move slowly), she finally packed up the venerable hair-trunk, that had seen the rise and fall of several monarchs, and marched all the way from Edinbro' to this Midland English shire, to try what firm expostulation could do in the matter of bringing her niece to see the error of her ways.

For a whole week it did very little.

Lilian was independent in more ways than one. She had considerable spirit and 500*l.* a year in her own right. Not only did she object to leave the Park, but she regarded with horror the prospect of going to reside with the guardians appointed to receive her by her father. Not that this idea need have filled her with dismay. Sir Guy Chetwoode, the actual guardian, was a young man not likely to trouble himself overmuch about any ward; while his mother, Lady Chetwoode, was that most

gracious of all things, a beautiful and lovable old lady.

Why Mr. Chesney had chosen so young a man to look after his daughter's interests must for ever remain a mystery—perhaps because he happened to be the oldest son of his oldest friend, long since dead. Sir Guy accepted the charge because he thought it uncivil to refuse, and chiefly because he believed it likely Miss Chesney would marry before her father's death. But events proved the fallacy of human thought. When Archibald Chesney's demise appeared in the 'Times' Sir Guy made a little face and took meekly a good deal of 'chaffing' at his brother's hands; while Lady Chesney sat down and, with a faint sinking at her heart, wrote a kindly letter to the orphan, offering her a home at Chetwoode. To this letter Lilian had sent a polite reply, thanking 'dear Lady Chetwoode' for her kindness, and

telling her she had no intention of quitting the Park just at present. Later on she would be only too happy to accept, etc. etc.

Now, however, standing in her own drawing-room, Lilian feels, with a pang, the game is almost played out—she must leave. Aunt Priscilla's arguments, detestable though they be, are unhappily quite unanswerable. To her own heart she confesses this much, and the little gay French song dies on her lips, and the smile fades from her eyes, and a very dejected and forlorn expression comes and grows upon her pretty face.

It is more than pretty, it is lovely—the fair, sweet childish face, framed in by its yellow hair; her great velvety eyes, now misty through vain longing, are blue as the skies above her; her nose is pure Greek; her forehead, low but broad, is partly shrouded by little wandering threads of gold that every now and

then break loose from bondage, while her lashes, long and dark, curl upward from her eyes, as though hating to conceal the beauty of the exquisite azure within.

She is not tall, and she is very slender, but not lean. She is wilful, quick-tempered, and impetuous, but large-hearted and lovable. There is a certain haughtiness about her that contrasts curiously but pleasantly with her youthful expression, and laughing kissable mouth. She is straight and lissome as a young ash-tree; her hands and feet are small and well-shaped; in a word, she is *Chic* from the crown of her fair head down to her little arched instep.

Just now, perhaps, as she hears the honest sound of her aunt's footstep in the hall a slight pout takes possession of her lips and a flickering frown adorns her brow. Aunt Priscilla is coming, and Aunt Priscilla brings

victory in her train, and it is not everyone can accept defeat with grace.

She hastily pulls up one of the blinds; and as old Miss Chesney opens the door and advances up the room, young Miss Chesney rather turns her shoulder to her and stares moodily out of the window. But Aunt Priscilla is not to be daunted.

'Well, Lilian,' she says in a hopeful tone, and with an amount of faith admirable under the circumstances, 'I trust you have been thinking it over favourably, and that——'

'Thinking what over?' asks Lilian; which interruption is a mean subterfuge.

'——And that the night has induced you to see your situation in its proper light.'

'You speak as though I were the under-housemaid,' says Lilian, with a faint sense of humour. 'And yet the word suits me. Surely there never yet was such a situation as mine.

I wish my horrid cousin had been drowned in ——. No, Aunt Priscilla, the night has not reformed me. On the contrary, it has demoralised me, through a dream. I dreamt I went to Chetwoode, and, lo! the very first night I slept beneath its roof the ceiling in my room gave way, and falling, crushed me to fine powder. After such a ghastly warning do you still advise me to pack up and be off? If you do,' says Lilian solemnly, 'my blood be on your head.'

'Dreams go by contraries,' quotes Miss Priscilla sententiously. 'I don't believe in them. Besides, from all I have heard of the Chetwoodes they are far too well-regulated a family to have anything amiss with their ceilings.'

'Oh, how you *do* add fuel to the fire that is consuming me!' exclaims Lilian, with a groan. 'A well-regulated family—what can be more

awful? Ever since I have been old enough to reason I have looked with righteous horror upon a well-regulated family. Aunt Priscilla, if you don't change your tune I vow and protest I shall decide upon remaining here until my cousin takes me by the shoulders and places me upon the gravel outside.'

'I thought, Lilian,' says her aunt severely, 'you promised me yesterday to think seriously of what I have now been saying to you for a whole week without cessation.'

'Well, so I am thinking,' with a sigh. 'It is the amount of thinking I have been doing for a whole week without cessation that is gradually turning my hair grey.'

'It would be all very well,' says Miss Priscilla impatiently, 'if I could remain with you, but I cannot. I must return to my duties.' These duties consisted of persecuting poor little children every Sunday by compelling

them to attend her Scriptural class (so she called it) and answer such questions from the Old Testament as would have driven any experienced divinity student out of his mind; and on week days of causing much sorrow (and more bad language) to be disseminated amongst the women of the district by reason of her lectures on their dirt. 'And your cousin is in London, and naturally will wish to take possession in person.'

'How I wish poor papa had left the Park to me!' says Lilian discontentedly and somewhat irrelevantly.

'My dear child, I have explained to you at least a dozen times that such a gift was not in his power. It goes—that is, the Park—to a male heir, and——'

'Yes, I know,' petulantly. 'Well, then—I wish it *had* been in his power to leave it to me.'

'And how about writing to Lady Chetwoode?' says Aunt Priscilla, giving up the argument in despair. (She is a wise woman.) 'The sooner you do so the better.'

'I hate strangers,' says Lilian mournfully. 'They make me unhappy. Why can't I remain where I am? George or Archibald, or whatever his name is, might just as well let me have a room here. I'm sure the place is large enough. He need not grudge me one or two apartments. The left wing, for instance.'

'Lilian,' says Miss Chesney, rising from her chair, 'how old are you? Is it possible that at eighteen you have yet to learn the meaning of the word "propriety"? You—a *young girl*—to remain here alone with a *young man!*'

'He need never see me,' says Lilian, quite unmoved by this burst of eloquence. 'I

should take very good care of that, as I know I shall detest him.'

'I decline to listen to you,' says Miss Priscilla, raising her hands to her ears. 'You must be lost to all sense of decorum even to imagine such a thing. You and he in one house, how should you avoid meeting?'

'Well, even if we did meet,' says Lilian, with a small rippling laugh impossible to quell, 'I dare say he wouldn't bite me.'

'No'—sternly—'he would probably do worse. He would make love to you. Some instinct warns me,' says Miss Priscilla with the liveliest horror, gazing upon the exquisite, glowing face before her, 'that within five days he would be making *violent* love to you.'

'You strengthen my desire to stay,' says Lilian somewhat frivolously. 'I should so like to say "No" to him!'

'Lilian, you make me shudder,' says Miss Priscilla earnestly. 'When I was your age, even younger, I had a full sense of the horror of allowing any man to mention my name lightly. I kept all men at arm's length. I suffered no jesting or foolish talking from them. And mark the result,' says Miss Chesney with pride: 'I defy anyone to say a word of me but what is admirable, and replete with modesty.'

'Did anyone ever propose to you, auntie?' asks Miss Lilian, with a naughty laugh.

'Certainly. I had many offers,' replies Miss Priscilla promptly—which is one of the few lies she allows herself; 'I was persecuted by suitors in my younger days; but I refused them all. And if you will take my advice, Lilian,' says this virgin with much solemnity, 'you will never, *never* put yourself into the clutches of a *man*.' She utters this last word as though she would have said a tiger, or a

serpent, or anything else ruthless and blood-thirsty. 'But all this is beside the question.'

'It is rather,' says Lilian demurely. But, suddenly brightening, 'Between my dismal dreaming last night I thought of another plan.'

'Another!' with open dismay.

'Yes'—triumphantly—'it occurred to me that this bugbear my cousin might go abroad again. Like the Wandering Jew he is always travelling, and who knows but he may take a fancy to visit the South Pole, or discover the North-Western Passage, or go with Jules Verne to the centre of the earth? If so, why should not I remain here and keep house for him? What can be simpler?'

'Nothing'—tritely—'but unfortunately he is not going abroad again.'

'No! How do you know that?'

'Through Mr. Shrude, the solicitor.'

'Ah!' says Lilian in a despairing tone, 'how unhappy I am! Though I might have known that wretched young man would be the last to do what is his palpable duty.' There is a pause. Lilian's head sinks upon her hand; dejection shows itself in every feature. She sighs so heavily that Miss Priscilla's spirits rise and she assures herself the game is won. Rash hope

Suddenly Lilian's countenance clears; she raises her head, and a faint smile appears within her eyes.

'Aunt Priscilla, I have yet another plan,' she says cheerfully.

'Oh! my dear, I do hope not,' says poor Miss Chesney, almost on the verge of tears.

'Yes, and it emanated from you. Supposing I were to remain here, and he did fall in love with me, and married me—what then? Would not that solve the difficulty? Once the cere-

mony was performed he might go prying about all over the known globe for all I should care. I should have my dear Park. I declare,' says Lilian, waxing valiant, 'had he but one eye, or did he appear before me with a wooden leg (which I hold to be the most contemptible of all things), nothing should induce me to refuse him under the circumstances.'

'And are you going to throw yourself upon your cousin's generosity and actually ask him to take pity on you and make you his wife? Lilian, I fancied you had some pride,' says Miss Chesney gravely.

'So I have,' says Lilian, with a repentant sigh. 'How I wish I hadn't! No, I suppose it wouldn't do to marry him in that way, no matter how badly I treated him afterwards to make up for it. Well, my last hope is dead.

'And a good thing too. Now, had you not better sit down and write to Lady Chetwoode

or your guardian, naming an early day for going to them? Though what your father could have meant by selecting so young a man as guardian is more than I can imagine.'

'Because he wished me to live with Lady Chetwoode, who was evidently an old flame; and because Sir Guy, from all I hear, is a sort of Admirable Crichton—something as prosy as the Heir of Redclyffe, as dull as a Sir Galahad. A goody-goody old-young man. For my part I would have preferred a hoary-headed gentleman, with just a little spice of wickedness about him.'

'Lilian, don't be flippant,' in a tone of horror. 'I tremble when I reflect on the dangers that must attend your unbridled tongue.'

'Well, but, Aunt Priscilla'—plaintively—'one doesn't relish the thought of spending day after day with a man who will think it his duty to find fault every time I give way to my senti-

ments, and probably grow pale with disgust whenever I laugh aloud. Shan't I lead him a life!' says the younger Miss Chesney viciously, tapping the back of one small hand vigorously against the palm of the other. 'With the hope of giving that young man something to cavil at, I shall sustain myself.'

'Child,' says Miss Priscilla, 'let me recommend a course of severe study to you as the best means of subduing your evil inclinations.'

'I shall take your advice,' says the incorrigible Lilian: 'I shall study Sir Guy. I expect that will be the severest course of study I have ever undergone.'

'Get your paper and write,' says Miss Priscilla, who against her will is smiling grimly.

'I suppose, indeed, I must,' says Lilian, seating herself at her davenport with all the airs of a finished martyr. '"Needs must,"

you know, Aunt Priscilla. I dare say you recollect the rest of that rather vulgar proverb. I shall seal my fate this instant by writing to Lady Chetwoode. But, oh!' turning on her chair to regard her aunt, with an expression of the keenest reproach, 'how I wish you had not called them a "well-regulated family!"'

CHAPTER II.

Be not over-exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils.—MILTON.

THROUGH the open windows the merry-making sun is again dancing, its bright rays making still more dazzling the glory of the snowy tablecloth. The great silver urn is hissing and fighting with all around, as though warning his mistress to use him, as he is not one to be trifled with; while at the lower end of the table, exactly opposite Sir Guy's plate, lies the post upon a high salver, ready to the master's hand, as has been the custom at Chetwoode for generations.

An elderly butler, who has evidently seen service (in every sense of the word), and who is actually steeped in respectability up to his port-wine nose, hovers around the breakfast, adjusting this dish affectionately, and straightening that, until all is carefully awry, when he leaves the room with a sigh of satisfaction.

Evidently the family is late for breakfast. As a rule the Chetwoode family always is late for breakfast—just sufficiently so to make them certain everything will be quite ready by the time they get down.

Ten o'clock rings out mysteriously from the handsome marble clock upon the chimney-piece, and precisely three minutes afterwards the door is thrown open to admit an elderly lady, tall and fair, and still beautiful.

She walks with a slow, rather stately step, and in spite of her years carries her head

high. Upon this head rests the daintiest of morning caps, all white lace and delicate ribbon-bows, that match in colour her trailing gown. Her hands, small and tapering, are covered with rings; otherwise she wears no adornment of any kind. There is a benignity about her that goes straight to all hearts. Children adore her, dogs fawn upon her, young men bring to her all their troubles—the evil behaviour of their tailors and their mistresses are alike laid before her.

Now, finding the room empty, and knowing it to be four minutes after ten, she says to herself, 'The first!' with a little surprise and much pardonable pride, and seats herself with something of an air before the militant urn. When we are old it is so sweet to us to be younger than the young, when we are young it is so sweet to us to be just *vice versâ*. Oh, foolish youth!

Perhaps Lady Chetwoode's self-admiration would have grown beyond bounds, but that just at this instant voices in the hall distract her thoughts. The sounds make her face brighten and bring a smile to her lips. 'The boys' are coming. She draws the teacups a little nearer to her and makes a gentle fuss over the spoons. A light laugh echoes through the hall; it is answered, and then the door once more opens, and her two sons enter, Cyril, being the youngest, naturally coming first.

On seeing his mother he is pleased to make a gesture indicative of the most exaggerated surprise.

'Now, who could have anticipated it?' he says. 'Her gracious majesty already assembled, while her faithful subjects—— Well,' with a sudden change of tone, 'for my part I call it downright shabby of people to scramble down-

stairs before other people merely for the sake of putting them to the blush.'

'Lazy boy! no wonder you are ashamed of yourself when you look at the clock,' says Lady Chetwoode, smiling fondly as she returns his greeting.

'"Ashamed!" Pray do not misunderstand me. I have arrived at my twenty-sixth year without ever having mastered the meaning of that word. I flatter myself I am a degree beyond that.'

'Last night's headache quite gone, mother?' asks Sir Guy, bending over her chair to kiss her: an act he performs tenderly, and as though the doing of it is sweet to him.

'Quite, my dear,' replies she; and there is perhaps the faintest, the *very* faintest, accession of warmth in her tone, an almost imperceptible increase of kindliness in her smile as she speaks to her eldest son.

'That's right,' says he, patting her gently on the shoulder; after which he goes over to his own seat and takes up the letters lying before him.

'Positively I never thought of the post,' says Lady Chetwoode. 'And here I have been for quite five minutes with nothing to do. I might as well have been digesting my correspondence, if there is any for me.'

'One letter for you; five, as usual, for Cyril; one for me,' says Guy. 'All Cyril's.' Examining them critically at arm's length. 'Written evidently by *very* young women.'

'Yes, they *will* write to me,' returns Cyril, receiving them with a sigh, and regarding them in turn with careful scrutiny. 'It is nothing short of disgusting,' he says presently, singling out one of the letters with his first finger. 'This is the fourth she has written me this week, and as yet it is only Friday. I

won't be able to bear it much longer; I shall certainly make a stand one of these days.'

'I would if I were you,' says Guy, laughing.

'I have just heard from Lilian Chesney,' suddenly says Lady Chetwoode, speaking as though a bombshell had fallen in their midst. 'And she is really coming here next week!'

'No!' says Guy without meaning contradiction, which at the moment is far from him.

'Yes,' replies his mother somewhat faintly.

'Another!' murmurs Cyril weakly—he being the only one of the three who finds any amusement in the situation. 'Well, at all events *she* can't write to me, as we shall be under the same roof; and I shall dismiss the very first servant who brings me a *billet-doux*. How pleased you do look, Guy! And no wonder—a whole live ward, and all to yourself. Lucky you!'

'It is hard on you, mother,' says Guy, 'but it can't be helped. When I promised I made sure her father would have lived for years to come.'

'You did what was quite right,' says Lady Chetwoode, who, if Guy were to commit a felony, would instantly say it was the only proper course to be pursued. 'And it might have been much worse. Her mother's daughter cannot fail to be a lady in the best sense of the word.'

'I'm sure I hope she won't, then,' says Cyril, who all this time has been carefully laying in an uncommonly good breakfast. 'If there is one thing I hate, it is a young lady. Give me a girl.'

'But, my dear, what an extraordinary speech! Surely a girl may be a young lady.'

'Yes, but unfortunately a young lady isn't always a girl. My experience of the former

class is, that, no matter what their age, they are as old as the hills, and know considerably more than they ought to know.'

'And just as we had got rid of one ward so successfully we must needs get another,' says Lady Chetwoode, with a plaintive sigh. 'Dear Mabel! she was certainly very sweet, and I was excessively fond of her, but I do hope this new-comer will not be so troublesome.'

'I hope she will be as pleasant to talk to and as good to look at,' says Cyril. 'I confess I missed Mab awfully. I never felt so down in my life as when she declared her intention of marrying Tom Steyne.'

'I never dreamed the marriage would have turned out so well,' says Lady Chetwoode in a pleased tone. 'She was such an—an—unreasonable girl. But it is wonderful how well she gets on with a husband.'

'Flirts always make the best wives. You forget that, mother.'

'And what a coquette she was! If Lilian Chesney resembles her, I don't know what I shall do. I am getting too old to take care of pretty girls.'

'Perhaps Miss Chesney is ugly.'

'I hope not, my dear,' says Lady Chetwoode, with a strong shudder. 'Let her be anything but that. I can't bear ugly women. No—her mother was lovely. I used to think'—relapsing again into the plaintive style—'that one ward in a lifetime would be sufficient, and now we are going to have another.'

'It is all Guy's fault,' says Cyril. 'He does get himself up so like the moral Pecksniff. There is a stern and dignified air about him would deceive a Machiavelli, and takes the hearts of parents by storm. Poor Mr. Chesney, who never even saw him, took him on hearsay

as his only child's guardian. This solitary fact shows how grossly he has taken in society in general. He is every bit as immoral as the rest of us, only——'

'Immoral! My *dear* Cyril——' interrupts Lady Chetwoode severely.

'Well, let us say frivolous. It has just the same meaning nowadays, and sounds nicer. But he looks a "grave and reverend," if ever there was one. Indeed, his whole appearance is enough to make any passer-by stop short and say, "There goes a good young man."'

'I'm sure I hope not,' says Guy, half-offended, wholly disgusted. 'I should be inclined to shoot anyone who told me I was a "good young man." I have no desire to pose as such—my ambition does not lie that way.'

'I don't believe you know what you are saying, either of you,' says Lady Chetwoode, who, though accustomed to them, can never

entirely help showing surprise at their sentiments and expressions every now and then. 'I should be sorry to think everybody did not know you to be (as I do) good as gold.'

'Thank you, Madre. One compliment from you is worth a dozen from anyone else,' says Cyril. 'Any news, Guy? You seem absorbed. I cannot tell you how I admire anyone who takes an undisguised interest in his correspondence. Now, I'—gazing at his five unopened letters—'cannot get up the feeling to save my life. Guy'—reproachfully—'don't you see your mother is dying of curiosity?'

'The letter is from Trant,' says Guy, looking up from the closely-written sheet before him. 'He wants to know if we will take a tenant for "The Cottage." "A lady"'—reading from the letter—'"who has suffered much, and who wishes for quietness and retirement from the world.'"

'I should recommend a convent under the circumstances,' says Cyril. 'It would be the very thing for her. I don't see why she should come down here to suffer, and put us all in the dumps, and fill our woods with her sighs and moans.'

'Is she young?' asks Lady Chetwoode anxiously.

'No—I don't know, I'm sure. I should think not by Trant's way of mentioning her. "An old friend," he says, though, of course, that might mean anything.'

'Married?'

'Yes. A widow.'

'Dear me!' says Lady Chetwoode distastefully. 'A most objectionable class of people. Always in the way, and—er—very designing, and that.'

'If she is anything under forty she will want to marry Guy directly,' Cyril puts in with

an air of conviction. 'If I were you, Guy, I should pause and consider before I introduced such a dangerous ingredient so near home. Just fancy, mother, seeing Guy married to a woman probably older than you!'

'Yes—I shouldn't wonder,' says Lady Chetwoode nervously. 'My dear child, do nothing in a hurry. Tell Colonel Trant you—you—do not care about letting The Cottage just at present.'

'Nonsense, mother. How can you be so absurd? Don't you think I may be considered proof against designing widows at twenty-nine? Never mind Cyril's talk. I dare say he is afraid for himself. Indeed, the one thing that makes me hesitate about obliging Trant is the knowledge of how utterly incapable my poor brother is of taking care of himself.'

'It is only too true,' says Cyril resignedly. 'I feel sure if the widow is flouted by you she

will revenge herself by marrying me. Guy, as you are strong, be merciful.'

'After all, the poor creature may be quite old, and we are frightening ourselves unnecessarily,' says Lady Chetwoode in all sincerity.

At this both Guy and Cyril laugh in spite of themselves.

'Are you really afraid, mother?' asks Cyril fondly. 'What a goose you are about your "boys!" Are we always to be children in your eyes? Not that I wonder at your horror of widows. Even the immortal Weller shared your sentiments, and warned his "Samivel" against them. Never mind, mother; console yourself. I for one swear by all that is lovely never to seek this particular "widder" in marriage.

False oath!

'You see he seems to take it so much for

granted, my giving The Cottage and that, I hardly like to refuse.'

'It would not be of the least consequence, if it was not situated actually in our own woods, and not two miles from the house. There lies the chief objection,' says Lady Chetwoode.

'Yes. Yet what can I do? It is a pretty little place, and it seems a pity to let it sink into decay. This tenant may save it.'

'It is a lovely spot. I often fancy, Guy,' says his mother somewhat sadly, 'I should like to go and live there myself when you get a wife.'

'Why should you say that?' says Guy almost roughly. 'If my taking a wife necessitates your quitting Chetwoode I shall never burden myself with that luxury.'

'You don't follow out the Mater's argument, dear boy,' says Cyril smoothly. 'She means that when your sylvan widow claims

you as her own she *must* leave, as of course the same roof could not cover both. But you are eating nothing, mother; Guy's foolish letter has taken away your appetite. Take some of this broiled ham.'

'No, thank you, dear, I don't care for——'

'Don't perjure yourself. You know you have had a positive passion for broiled ham from your cradle up. I remember all about it. I insist on your eating your breakfast, or you will have that beastly headache back again.'

'My dear,' says his mother entreatingly, 'do you think you could be silent for a few minutes while I discuss this subject with your brother?',

'I shan't speak again. After that severe snubbing consider me dumb. But do get it over quick,' says Cyril. 'I can't be a mute for ever.'

'I suppose I had better say yes,' says Guy doubtfully. 'It looks rather like the dog in the manger having The Cottage idle and still refusing Trant's friend.'

'That reminds me of a capital story,' breaks in the irrepressible Cyril gaily. 'By Jove what a sell it was! One fellow met another fellow——'

'I shall refuse, of course, if you wish it,' Guy goes on, addressing his mother, and scorning to notice this brilliant interruption.

'No, no, dear. Write and say you will think about it.'

'Won't you listen to my capital story?' asks Cyril in high disgust. 'Very good. You will both be sorry afterwards—when it is too late.'

Even this awful threat takes no effect.

'Unfortunately I can't do that,' says Guy, answering Lady Chetwoode. 'His friend is

obliged to leave the place she is now in, immediately, and he wants her to come here next week—next'—glancing at the letter—'Saturday.'

'Misfortunes never come single,' remarks Cyril; 'ours seem to crowd. First a ward and then a widow, and all in the same week.'

'Not only the same week, but the same day,' exclaims Lady Chetwoode, looking at her letter; whereupon they all laugh, though they scarcely know why.

'What! Is she too coming on Saturday?' asks Guy. 'How ill-timed! I am bound to go to the Bellairs on that day, whether I like it or not, to dine, and sleep, and spend my time generally. The old boy has some young dogs of which he is immensely proud, and has been tormenting me for a month past to go and see them. So yesterday he seized upon me again,

and I didn't quite like to refuse, he seemed so bent on getting my opinion of the pups.'

'Why not go early, and be back in time for dinner?'

'Can't, unfortunately. There is to be a dinner there in the evening for some cousin who is coming to pay them a visit, and I promised Harry, who doesn't shine in conversation, to stay and make myself agreeable to her. It's a bore rather, as I fear it will look slightly heathenish my not being at the station to meet Miss Chesney.'

'Don't put yourself out about that—I'll do all I can to make up for your loss,' says Cyril, who is eminently good-natured. 'I'll meet her, if you wish it, and bring her home.'

'Thanks, old man; you're awfully good. It would look inhospitable neither of us being on the spot to bid her welcome. Take the carriage and——'

'Oh, by Jove, I didn't bargain for the carriage. To be smothered alive in July is not a fascinating idea. Don't you think, mother'—in an insinuating voice—'Miss Chesney would prefer the dogcart or the——'

'My dear Cyril! Of course you must meet her in the carriage,' says his mother in the shocked tone that usually ends all disputes.

'So be it. I give in. Though when I arrive here in the last stage of exhaustion, reclining in Miss Chesney's arms, you will be to blame,' says Cyril amiably. 'But, to return to your widow, Guy—who is to receive her?'

'I dare say by this time she has learned to take care of herself,' laughing. 'At all events she does not weigh upon my conscience. Even should I consent to oblige Trant'—looking at his mother—'by having her at The Cottage as a tenant.'

'It looks very suspicious, her being turned out of her last place,' Cyril says in an uncomfortable tone. 'Perhaps——' Here he pauses somewhat mysteriously.

'Perhaps what?' asks his mother, struck by his manner.

'Perhaps she is mad,' suggests Cyril in an awesome whisper. 'An escaped lunatic—a maniac!'

'I know no one who borders so much on lunacy as yourself,' says Guy. 'After all, what does it matter whether our tenant is fat, fair, and forty, or a lean old maid? It will oblige Trant, and it will keep the place together. Mother, tell me to say yes.'

Thus desired, Lady Chetwoode gives the required permission.

'A new tenant at The Cottage and a young lady visitor—a permanent visitor! It only requires some one to leave us a legacy in the

shape of a newborn babe, to make up the sum of our calamities,' says Cyril as he steps out of the low French window and drops on to the sward beneath.

CHAPTER III.

She was beautiful as the lily-bosomed Houri that gladdens the visions of the poet when, soothed to dreams of pleasantness and peace, the downy pinions of Sleep wave over his turbulent soul!—*From the Arabic.*

ALL the flowers at Chetwoode are rejoicing; their heads are high uplifted, their sweetest perfumes are making still more sweet the soft, coquettish wind that, stealing past them, snatches their kisses ere they know.

It is a glorious day, full of life, and happy sunshine, and music from the throats of many birds. All the tenors, and sopranos, and con-

traltos of the air seem to be having one vast concert, and are filling the woods with melody.

In the morning a little laughing, loving shower came tumbling down into the earth's embrace, where it was caught gladly and kept for ever—a little baby shower, on which the sunbeams smiled, knowing it had neither power nor wish to kill them.

But now the greedy earth has grasped it, and others, knowing its fate, fear to follow, and only the pretty sparkling jewels that tremble on the grass tell of its having been.

In the very centre of the great lawn that stretches beyond the pleasure-grounds stands a mighty oak. Its huge branches throw their arms far and wide, making a shelter beneath them for all who may choose to come and seek there for shade. Around its base pretty rustic chairs are standing, in somewhat dissipated order, while on its topmost bough a crow is

swaying and swinging as the soft wind rushes by, making an inky blot upon the brilliant green, as it were a patch upon the cheek of a court belle.

Over all the land from his lofty perch this crow can see—can mark the smiling fields, the yellowing corn, the many-antlered deer in the Park, the laughing brooklets, the gurgling streams, that now in the great heat go 'azily and stumble sleepily over every pebble in their way.

He can see his neighbours' houses, perhaps his own snug nest, and all the beauty, and richness, and warmth of an English landscape.

But presently—being a bird of unformed tastes, or unappreciative, or perhaps fickle—he tires of looking, and, flapping heavily his black wings, rises slowly and sails away.

Towards the east he goes, the sound of his harsh but homely croak growing fainter as

he flies. Over the trees in their gorgeous clothing, across the murmuring brooks, through the uplands, over the heads of the deer that gaze at him with their mournful, gentle eyes, he travels, never ceasing in his flight until he comes to a small belt of firs, evidently set apart, in the centre of which stands 'The Cottage.'

It is considerably larger than one would expect from its name. A long, low, straggling house, about three miles from Chetwoode entrance-gate, going by the road, but only one mile, taking a short cut through the Park. A very pretty house—with a garden in front, carefully hedged round, and another garden at the back—situated in a lovely spot—perhaps the most enviable in all Chetwoode—silent, dreamy, where one might, indeed, live for ever, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.'

In the garden all sorts of the sweetest old world flowers are blooming—pinks and carnations, late lilies and sweet Williams; the velvety heartsease, breathing comfort to the poor love-that-lies-a-bleeding; the modest forget-me-not, the fragrant mignonette (whose qualities, they rudely say, surpass its charms), the starry jessamine, the frail woodbine; while here and there from every nook and corner shines out the fairest, loveliest, queenliest flower of all—the rose.

Every bush is rich with them; the air is heavy with their odour. Roses of every hue, of every size, from the grand old cabbage to the smallest Scotch, are here. One gazes round in silent admiration, until the great love of them swells within the heart and a desire for possession arises, when, growing murderous, one wishes, like Nero, they had but one neck, that they might all be gathered at a blow.

Upon the house only snow-white roses grow. In great masses they uprear their heads, peeping curiously in at the windows, trailing lovingly round the porches, nestling under the eaves, drooping coquettishly at the angles. To-day a raindrop has fallen into each scented heart, has lingered there all the morning, and is still loth to leave. Above the flowers the birds hover twittering; beneath them the ground is as a snowy carpet from their fallen petals. Poor petals! How sad it is that they must fall! Yet, even in death, how sweet!

It is Saturday. In the morning the new tenant was expected—the evening is to bring the new ward. Lady Chetwoode, in consequence, is a little trouble-minded. Guy has gone to the Bellairs. Cyril is in radiant spirits. Not that this latter fact need be recorded, as Cyril belongs to those favoured ones who

at their birth receive a dowry from their fairy godparents of unlimited good-humour.

He is at all times an easy-going young man, healthy, happy, whose path in life up to this has been strewn with roses. To him the world isn't 'half a bad place,' which he is content to take as he finds it, never looking too closely into what doesn't concern him—a treatment the world evidently likes, as it regards him (especially the gentler portion of it) with the utmost affection.

Even with that rare class, mothers blessed with handsome daughters, he finds favour, either through face or his manner, or because of the fact that, though a younger son, he has 900*l.* a year of his own and a pretty place called Moorlands, about six miles from Chetwoode. It was his mother's portion, and is now his.

He is tall, broad-shouldered, and rather handsome, with perhaps more mouth than

usually goes to one man's share; but, as he has laughed straight through from his cradle to his twenty-sixth year, this is scarcely to be wondered at. His eyes are grey and frank, his hair is brown, his skin a good deal tanned. He is very far from being an Adonis, but he is good to look at, and to know him is to like him.

Just now, luncheon being over, and nothing else left to do, he is feeling rather bored than otherwise, and lounges into his mother's morning-room, being filled with a desire to have speech with somebody. The somebody nearest to him at the moment being Lady Chetwoode, he elects to seek her presence and inflict his society upon her.

'It's an awful nuisance having anything on your mind, isn't it, mother?' he says genially.

'It is indeed, my dear,' with heartfelt

earnestness and a palpable expectation of worse things yet to come. 'What unfortunate mistake have you been making now?'

'Not one. "You wrong me, Brutus." I have been as gently behaved as a skipping lamb all the morning. No; I mean having to fetch our visitor this evening weighs upon my spirits and somehow idles me. I can settle to nothing.'

'You seldom can, dear, can you?' says Lady Chetwoode mildly, with unmeant irony. 'But'—as though suddenly inspired—'suppose you go for a walk?'

This is a mean suggestion, and utterly unworthy of Lady Chetwoode. The fact is, the day is warm and she is sleepy, and she knows she will not get her forty winks unless he takes himself out of the way. So, with a view to getting rid of him, she grows hypocritically kind.

'A walk will do you good,' she says. You don't take half exercise enough. And you know, the want of it makes people fat.'

'I believe you are right,' Cyril says, rising. He stretches himself, laughs indolently at his own lazy figure in an opposite mirror, after which he vanishes almost as quickly as even she can desire.

Five minutes later, with an open book upon her knees, as a means of defence should anyone enter unannounced, Lady Chetwoode is snoozing comfortably; while Cyril, following the exact direction taken by the crow in the morning, walks leisurely onward, under the trees, to meet his fate!

Quite unthinkingly, quite unsuspiciously he pursues his way, dreaming of anything in the world but The Cottage and its new inmate, until the house, suddenly appearing before him, recalls his wandering thoughts.

The hall-door stands open. Every one of the windows is thrown wide. There is about everything the unmistakable *silent* noise that belongs to an inhabited dwelling, however quiet. The young man, standing still, wonders vaguely at the change.

Then all at once a laugh rings out; there is an undeniable scuffle, and presently a tiny black dog with a little mirthful yelp breaks from the house into the garden and commences a mad scamper all round and round the rose-trees.

An instant later he is followed by a trim maid-servant, who, flushed but smiling, rushes after him, making well-directed but ineffectual pounces on the truant. As she misses him the dog gives way to another yelp (of triumph this time), and again the hunt goes on.

But now there comes the sound of other feet, and Cyril, glancing up from his interested

watch over the terrier's movements, sees surely something far, far lovelier than he has ever seen before.

Even at this early moment his heart gives a little bound and then seems to cease from beating.

Upon the doorstep stands a girl—although quite three-and-twenty she still looks the merest girl—clad in a gown of clear black-and-white cambric. A huge coarse white apron covers all the front of this gown, and is pinned, French fashion, half-way across her bosom. Her arms, white and soft, and rounded as a child's, are bared to the elbows, her sleeves being carefully tucked up. Two little feet encased in Louis Quinze slippers peep coyly from beneath her robe.

Upon this vision Cyril gazes, his whole heart in his eyes, and marks with wondering admiration each fresh beauty. She is tall,

rather *posée* in figure, with a small, proud head, and the carriage of a goddess. Her features are not altogether perfect, and yet (or rather because of it) she is extremely beautiful. She has great, soft, trusting eyes of a deep rare grey, that looking compel the truth; above her low white forehead her hair rolls back in silky ruffled waves, and is gathered into a loose knot behind. It is a rich nut-brown in colour, through which runs a faint tinge of red that turns to burnished gold under the sun's kiss. Her skin is exquisite, pale but warm, through which as she speaks the blood comes and lingers awhile, and flies only to return. Her mouth is, perhaps, strictly speaking, in a degree imperfect, yet it is one of her principal charms; it is large and lovable, and covers pretty teeth as white as snow. For my part I love a large mouth, if well-shaped, and do not believe a hearty laugh can

issue from a small one. And, after all, what is life without its laughter?

A little white cap of the 'mob' description adorns her head, and is trimmed fancifully with black velvet bows that match her gown. Her hands are small and fine, the fingers tapering; just now they are clasped together excitedly; and a brilliant colour has come into her cheeks as she stands (unconscious of criticism) and watches the depravity of her favourite.

'Oh! catch him, Kate,' she cries in a clear, sweet voice, that is now rather impetuous and suggests rising indignation. "Wicked little wretch! He shall have a good whipping for this. Dirty little dog'—(this to the black terrier, in a tone of reproachful disgust)—'not to want his nice clean bath after all the dust of yesterday and to-day!'

This rebuke is evidently lost upon the re-

probate terrier, who still flies before the enemy who follows on his heels in hot pursuit. Round and round, in and out, hither and thither he goes, the breathless maid after him, the ceaseless upbraiding of his mistress ringing in his ears. The nice clean bath has no charms for this degenerate dog, although his ablutions are to be made sweet by the touch of those snowy dimpled hands now clasped in an agony of expectation. No, this miserable animal, disdaining all the good things in store for him, rushes past Kate, past his angry mistress, past the roses, out through the bars of the gate right into Cyril's arms! Oh, ill-judging dog!

Cyril, having caught him, holds him closely, in spite of his vehement struggles, for, scenting mischief in the air, he fights valiantly for freedom.

Kate runs to the garden-gate, so does the

bare-armed goddess; and there, on the path, behold their naughty treasure held fast in a stranger's arms!

When she sees him the goddess suddenly freezes and grows gravely dignified. The smile departs from her lips, the rich crimson dies, while in its place a faint, delicate blush comes to suffuse her cheeks.

'This is your dog, I think?' says Cyril, pretending to be doubtful on the subject; though who could be more sure?

'Yes—thank you.' Then as her eyes fall upon her lovely naked arms the blush grows deeper and deeper, until at length her face is red as one of her own perfect roses.

'He was very dusty after yesterday's journey, and I was going to wash him,' she says, with a gentle dignity but an evident anxiety to explain.

'Lucky dog!' says Cyril gravely, in a low tone.

Kate has disappeared into the background with the refractory pet, whose quavering protests are lost in the distance. Again silence has fallen upon the house, the wood, the flowers. The faintest flicker of a smile trembles for one instant round the corners of the stranger's lips, then is quickly subdued.

'Thank you, sir,' she says once more, quietly, and, turning away, is swallowed up hurriedly by the envious roses.

All the way home Cyril's mind is full of curious thought, though one topic alone engrosses it. The mistress of that small ungrateful terrier has taken complete and entire possession of him to the exclusion of all other matter. So the widow has not arrived in solitary state—that is evident. And what a lovely

girl to bring down and bury alive in this quiet spot. Who on earth can she be?

How beautiful her arms were, and her hands!—Even the delicate, tinted filbert nails had not escaped his eager gaze. How sweet she looked, how bright! Surely a widow would not be fit company for so gay a creature; and still, when she grew grave at the gate, when her smile faded, had not a wistful, sorrowful expression fallen across her face and into her exquisite eyes? Perhaps she, too, has suffered—is in trouble, and, through sympathy, clings to her friend the widow.

After a moment or two, this train of thought being found unsatisfactory, another forces its way to the surface.

By-the-bye, why should she not be her sister—that is, the widow's? Of course; nothing more likely. How stupid of him not

to have thought of that before! Naturally Mrs. Arlington has a sister, who has come down with her to see that the place is comfortable and well-situated, and that, and who will stay with her until the first loneliness that always accompanies a change has worn away.

And when it has worn away, what then? The conclusion of this thought causes Cyril an unaccountable pang, that startles even himself. In five minutes—in five short minutes—surely no woman's eyes, however lovely, could have wrought much mischief, and yet—and yet—what was there about her to haunt one so?

He rouses himself with an effort and refuses to answer his own question. Is he a lovesick boy, to fancy himself enthralled by each new pretty face he sees? Is there only one laughing mouth and one pair of deep

grey eyes in the world? What a fool one can be at times!

One can indeed!

He turns his thoughts persistently upon the coming season, the anticipation of which, only yesterday, filled him with the keenest delight. But three or four short weeks to pass, and the 12th will be here, bringing with it all the joy and self-gratulation that can be derived from the slaying of many birds. He did very well last year, and earned himself many laurels, and the reputation of being a crack shot. How will it be this season? Already it seems to him he scents the heather and feels the weight of his trusty gun upon his shoulder, and the soft patter of his good dog's paws behind him. What an awful sell it would be if the birds proved scarce! Warren spoke highly of them the other day, and Warren is an old hand; but still—but still——

How could a widow of forty have a sister of twenty—unless, perhaps, she was a step-sister? Yes, that must be it. Step—— Pshaw!

It is a matter of congratulation that just at this moment Cyril finds himself in view of the house, and, pulling out his watch, discovers he has left himself only ten minutes in which to get himself ready, before starting for the station to meet Miss Chesney.

Perforce, therefore, he leaves off his cogitations, nor renews them until he is seated in the detested carriage *en route* for Truston and the ward, when he is so depressed by the roof's apparent intention of descending bodily upon his head that he lets his morbid imagination hold full sway and gives himself up to the gloomiest forebodings, of which the chief is that the unknown being in possession of such great and hitherto unsurpassed beauty is, of course, not only beloved by but hopelessly

engaged to a man in every way utterly unworthy of her.

When he reaches Truston the train is almost due, and two minutes afterwards it steams into the station.

The passengers alight. Cyril gazes anxiously up and down the platform amongst the women, trying to discover which of them looks most likely to bear the name of Chesney.

A preternaturally tall young lady, with eyes like sloes and a very superior figure, attracts him most. She is apparently alone, and is looking round as though expecting some one. It is—it must be she.

Raising his hat, Cyril advances towards her and makes a slight bow, which is not returned. The sloes sparkle indignantly, the superior figure grows considerably more superior; and the young lady, turning as though for protection from this bad man who has so insolently

and openly molested her in the broad daylight, lays her hand with an expression of relief upon the arm of a gentleman who has just joined her.

'I thought you were never coming,' she says in a clear distinct tone meant for Cyril's discomfiture, casting upon that depraved person a glance replete with scorn.

As her companion happens to be Harry Bellair of Belmont, Mr. Chetwoode is rather taken aback. He moves aside and colours faintly. Harry Bellair, who is a young gentleman addicted to huge plaids and low hats, and three or four lockets on his watch-chain, being evidently under the impression that Cyril has been 'up to one of his larks,' bestows upon him in passing a covert but odiously knowing wink, that has the effect of driving Cyril actually wild, and makes him give way to low expressions under his breath.

'Vulgar beast!' he says at length out loud with much unction, which happily affords him instant relief.

'Are you looking for me?' says a soft voice at his elbow, and turning he beholds a lovely childish face upturned somewhat timidly to his.

'Miss Chesney?' he asks with hesitation, being mindful of his late defeat.

'Yes,' smiling. 'It *is* for me, then, you are looking? 'Oh'—with a thankful sigh—'I am so glad! I have wanted to ask you the question for two minutes, but I was afraid you might be the wrong person.'

'I wish you had spoken'—laughing—'you would have saved me from much ignominy. I fancied you something altogether different from what you are,'—with a glance full of kindly admiration—'and I fear I made rather a fool of myself in consequence. I beg your

pardon for having kept you so long in suspense, and especially for having in my ignorance mistaken you for that black-browed lady.' Here he smiles down on the fair sweet little face that is smiling up at him.

'Was it that tall young lady you called a "beast"?' asks Miss Lilian, demurely. 'If so, it wasn't very polite of you, was it?'

'Oh'—with a laugh—'did you hear me? I doubt I have begun our acquaintance badly. No, notwithstanding the provocation I received (you saw the withering glance she bestowed upon me?), I refrained from evil language as far as she was concerned, and consoled myself by expending my rage upon her companion—the man who was seeing after her. Are you tired? Your journey has not been very unpleasant, I hope?'

'Not unpleasant at all. It was quite fine the entire time, and there was no dust.'

'Your trunks are labelled?'

'Yes.'

'Then perhaps you had better come with me. One of the men will see to your luggage. and will drive your maid home. She is with you?'

'Yes. That is, my nurse is; I have never had any other maid. This is Tipping,' says Miss Chesney, moving back a step or two, and drawing forward, with an affectionate gesture, a pleasant-faced, elderly woman of about fifty-five.

'I am glad to see you, Mrs. Tipping,' says Cyril genially, who does not think it necessary, like some folk, to treat the lower classes with studied coldness, as though they were a thing apart. 'Perhaps you will tell the groom about your mistress's things, while I take her out of this draughty station.'

Lilian follows him to the carriage, wonder-

ing as she goes. There is an air of command about this new acquaintance that puzzles her. Is he Sir Guy? Is it her guardian in *propriâ personâ* who has come to meet her? And could a guardian be so—so—likeable? Inwardly she hopes it may be so, being rather impressed by Cyril's manner and handsome face.

When they are about half-way to Chetwoode she plucks up courage to say, although the saying of it costs her a brilliant blush, 'Are you my guardian?'

'I call that a most unkind question,' says Cyril. 'Have I fallen short in any way, that the thought suggests itself? Do you mean to insinuate I am not guarding you properly now? Am I not taking sufficiently good care of you?'

'You *are* my guardian then?' says Lilian, with such unmistakable hope in her tones that Cyril laughs outright.

'No, I am not,' he says; 'I wish I were; though for your own sake it is better as it is. Your guardian is no end a better fellow than I am in every way. He would have come to meet you to-day, but he was obliged to go some miles away on business.'

'Business!' thinks Miss Chesney disdainfully. 'Of course it would never do for the goody-goody to neglect his business. Oh, dear! I know we shall not get on at all.'

'I am very glad he did not put himself out for me,' she says, glancing at Cyril from under her long curling lashes. 'It would have been a pity, as I have not missed him at all.'

'I feel intensely grateful to you for that speech,' says Cyril. 'When Guy cuts me out later on—as he always does—I shall still have the memory of it to fall back upon.'

'Is this Chetwoode?' Lilian asks, five minutes later, as they pass through the entrance-

gate. 'What a charming avenue!'—putting her head out of the window 'and so dark. I like it dark; it reminds me of'—she pauses, and two large tears come slowly, slowly into her blue eyes and tremble there—'my home,' she says in a low tone.

'You must try to be happy with us,' Cyril says kindly, taking one of her hands and pressing it gently, to enforce his sympathy; and then the horses draw up at the hall door, and he helps her to alight, and presently she finds herself within the doors of Chetwoode.

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CHAPTER IV.

Ye scenes of my childhood, whose loved recollection
Embitters the present, compared with the past.—Byron.

WHEN Lady Chetwoode who is sitting in the drawing-room, hears the carriage draw up to the door she straightens herself in her chair, smoothes down the folds of her black velvet gown with rather nervous fingers, and prepares for an unpleasant surprise. She hears Cyril's voice in the hall inquiring where his mother is, and, rising to her feet, she makes ready to receive the new ward.

She has put on what she fondly hopes is a

particularly gracious air, but which is in reality a palpable mixture of fear and uncertainty. The door opens—there is a slight pause; and then Lilian, slight, and fair, and pretty, stands upon the threshold.

She is very pale, partly through fatigue, but much more through nervousness and the selfsame feeling of uncertainty that is weighing down her hostess. As her eyes meet Lady Chetwoode's they take an appealing expression that goes straight to the heart of that kindest of women.

'You have arrived, my dear,' she says, a ring of undeniable cordiality in her tone, while from her face all the unpleasant fear has vanished. She moves forward to greet her guest, and as Lilian comes up to her takes the fair sweet face between her hands and kisses her softly on each cheek.

'You are like your mother,' she says pre-

sently, holding the girl a little way from her and regarding her with earnest attention. 'Yes—very like your mother, and she was beautiful. You are welcome to Chetwoode, my dear child.'

Lilian, who is feeling rather inclined to cry, does not trust herself to make any spoken rejoinder, but putting up her lips of her own accord, presses them gratefully to Lady Chetwoode's, thereby ratifying the silent bond of friendship that without a word has on the instant been sealed between the old woman and the young one.

A great sense of relief has fallen upon Lady Chetwoode. Not until now, when her fears have been proved groundless, does she fully comprehend the amount of uneasiness and positive horror with which she has regarded the admittance of a stranger into her happy home circle. The thought that something unrefined,

disagreeable, unbearable, might be coming, has followed her like a nightmare for the past week, but now, in the presence of this lovely child, it has fled away ashamed, never to return.

Lilian's delicate, well-bred face and figure, her small hands, her graceful movements, her whole air, proclaim her one of the world to which Lady Chetwoode belongs, and the old lady, who is aristocrat to her fingers' ends, hails the fact with delight. Her beauty alone had almost won her cause—when she cast that beseeching glance from the doorway; and now when she lets the heavy tears grow in her blue eyes, all doubt is at an end, and 'almost' gives way to 'quite.'

Henceforth she is altogether welcome at Chetwoode, as far as its present gentle mistress is concerned.

'Cyril took care of you, I hope?' says Lady

Chetwoode, glancing over her guest's head at her second son, and smiling kindly.

'Great care of me,' returning the smile.

'But you are tired, of course; it is a long journey, and no doubt you are glad to reach home,' says Lady Chetwoode, using the word naturally. And though the mention of it causes Lilian a pang, still there is something tender and restful about it too, that gives some comfort to her heart.

'Perhaps you would like to go to your room,' continues Lady Chetwoode, thoughtfully, 'though I fear your maid cannot have arrived yet.'

'Miss Chesney, like Juliet, boasts a nurse,' says Cyril; 'she scorns to travel with a mere maid.'

'My nurse has always attended me,' says Lilian, laughing and blushing. 'She has waited on me since I was a month old. I

should not know how to get on without her, and I am sure she could not get on without me. I think she is far better than any maid I could get.'

'She must have an interest in you that no new-comer could possibly have,' says Lady Chetwoode, who is in the humour to agree with anything Lilian may say, so thankful is she to her for being what she is. And yet, so strong is habit, that, involuntarily as she speaks, her eyes seek Lilian's hair, which is dressed to perfection. 'I have no doubt she is a treasure,' —with an air of conviction. 'Come with me, my dear.'

They leave the room together. In the hall the housekeeper coming forward says respectfully:

'Shall I take Miss Chesney to her room, my Lady?'

'No, Matthews,' says Lady Chetwoode,

graciously; 'it will give me pleasure to take her there myself.'

By which speech all the servants are at once made aware that Miss Chesney is already in high favour with 'my Lady,' who never, except on very rare occasions, takes the trouble to see personally after her visitors' comfort.

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When Lilian has been ten minutes in her room Mrs. Tipping arrives, and is shown upstairs, where she finds her small mistress evidently in the last stage of despondency. These ten lonely minutes have been fatal to her new-born hopes, and have reduced her once more to the melancholy frame of mind in which she left her home in the morning. All this the faithful Tipping sees at a glance, and instantly essays to cheer her.

Silently and with careful fingers she first removes her hat, then her jacket, then she

induces her to stand up, and, taking off her dress, throws round her a white wrapper taken from a trunk, and prepares to brush the silky yellow hair that for eighteen years has been her own to dress, and tend, and admire.

'Eh, Miss Lilian, child, but it's a lovely place!' she says presently, this speech being intended as part of the cheering process.

'It seems a fine place,' says the 'child' indifferently.

'Fine it is indeed. Grander even than the Park, I'm thinking.'

'"Grander than the Park!"' says Miss Chesney, rousing to unexpected fervour. 'How can you say that? Have you grown fickle, Nurse? There is no place to be compared to the Park, not one in all the world. You can think as you please, of course'—with reproachful scorn—'but it is *not* grander than the Park.'

'I meant larger, hinny,' soothingly.

'It is not larger.'

'But, darling, how can you say so when you haven't been round it?'

'How can *you* say so when *you* haven't been round it?'

This is a poser. Nurse meditates a minute, and then says:

'Thomas—that's the groom that drove me —says it is.'

'Thomas'—with a look that, had the wretched Thomas been on the spot, would infallibly have reduced him to ashes—'and what does Thomas know about it? It is *not* larger.'

Silence.

'Indeed, my bairn, I think you might well be happy here,' says Nurse, tenderly returning to the charge.

'I don't want you to think about me at all,'

says Miss Chesney in trembling tones. 'You agreed with Aunt Priscilla that I ought to leave my dear, dear home, and I shall never forgive you for it. I am not happy here. I shall never be happy here. I shall die of fretting for the Park, and when I am *dead* you will perhaps be satisfied.'

'Miss Lilian!'

'You shan't brush my hair any more,' says Miss Lilian, dexterously evading the descent of the brush. 'I can do it for myself very well. You are a traitor.'

'I am sorry Miss Chesney if I have displeased you,' says Nurse with much dignity tempered with distress—only when deeply grieved and offended does she give her mistress her full title.

'How dare you call me Miss Chesney,' cries that young lady, springing to her feet. 'It is very unkind of you, and just now too,

when I am all alone in a strange house. Oh Nurse!' throwing her arms round the neck of that devoted and long-suffering woman, and forgetful of her resentment, which indeed was born only of her regret, 'I am so unhappy, and lonely, and sorry. What shall I do?'

'How can I tell you, my lamb?'—caressing with infinite affection the golden head that lies upon her bosom. 'All that I say only vexes you.'

'No it doesn't; I am wicked when I make you think that. After all'—raising her face—'I am not quite forsaken, I have you still, and you will never leave me.'

'Not unless I die, my dear,' says Nurse, earnestly. 'And Miss Lilian, how can you look at her Ladyship without knowing her to be a real friend. And Mr. Chetwoode too, and perhaps Sir Guy will be as nice, when you see him.'

'Perhaps he won't,' ruefully.

'That's nonsense my dear. Let us look at the bright side of things always. And by-and-by Master Taffy will come here on a visit, and then it will be like old times. Come, now, be reasonable, child of my heart,' says Nurse, 'and tell me, won't you look forward to having Master Taffy here?'

'I wish he was here now,' says Lilian, visibly brightening. 'Yes; perhaps they will ask him. But Nurse, do you remember when last I saw Taffy it was at——'

Here she shows such unmistakable symptoms of relapsing into the tearful mood again, that Nurse sees the necessity of changing the subject.

'Come, my bairn, let me dress you for dinner,' she says, briskly, and presently, after a little more coaxing, she succeeds so well, that she sends her little mistress down to the drawing-room, looking her loveliest and her best.

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CHAPTER V.

Thoughtless of beauty, she was beauty's self,
Recluse amid the close-embowering woods.
THOMSON.

NEXT morning, having enjoyed the long and dreamless sleep that belongs to the heart-whole, Lilian runs down to the breakfast-room, with the warm sweet flush of health and youth upon her cheeks. Finding Lady Chetwoode and Cyril already before her, she summons all her grace to her aid and tries to look ashamed of herself.

'Am I late?' she asks, going up to Lady Chetwoode and giving her a little caress

as a good morning. Her very touch is so gentle, and childish, and loving, that it sinks straight into the deepest recesses of one's heart.

'No. Don't be alarmed. I have only just come down myself. You will soon find us out to be some of the laziest people alive.'

'I am glad of it; I like lazy people,' says Lilian; 'all the rest seem to turn their lives into one great worry.'

'Will you not give me a good morning, Miss Chesney?' says Cyril, who is standing behind her.

'Good morning,' putting her hand into his.

'But that is not the way you gave it to my mother,' in an aggrieved tone.

'No?—Oh,'—as she comprehends—'but you should remember how much more deserving your mother is.'

'With sorrow I acknowledge the truth of

your remark,' says Cyril, as he hands her her tea.

'Cyril is our naughty boy,' Lady Chetwoode says; 'we all spend our lives making allowances for Cyril. You must not mind what he says. I hope you slept well, Lilian; there is nothing does one so much good as a sound sleep, and you looked quite pale with fatigue last night. You see'—smiling—'how well I know your name. It is very familiar to me, having been your dear mother's.'

'It seems strangely familiar to me also, though I never knew your mother,' says Cyril. 'I don't believe I shall ever be able to call you Miss Chesney. Would it make you very angry if I called you Lilian?'

'Indeed, no—I shall be very much obliged to you; I should hardly know myself by the more formal title. You shall call me Lilian, and I shall call you Cyril—if you don't mind.'

'I don't think I do—much,' says Cyril; so the compact is signed.

'Guy will be here surely by luncheon,' says Lady Chetwoode, with a view to giving her guest pleasure.

'Oh! will he really?' says Lilian in a quick tone, suggestive of dismay.

'I am sure of it,' says Guy's mother, fondly —'he never breaks his word.'

'Of course not,' thinks Lilian to herself. 'Fancy a paragon going wrong! How I hate a man who never breaks his word. Why, the Medes and Persians would be weak-minded compared with him.'

'I suppose not,' she says aloud, rather vaguely.

'You seem to appreciate the idea of your guardian's return,' says Cyril, with a slight smile, having read half her thoughts correctly. 'Does the mere word frighten you? I should

like to know your real opinion of what a guardian ought to be.'

'How can I have an opinion on the subject, when I have never seen one?'

'Yet a moment ago I saw by your face you were picturing one to yourself.'

'If so, it could scarcely be Sir Guy—as he is not old.'

'Not very. He has still a few hairs and a few teeth remaining. But won't you then answer my question? What is your ideal guardian like?'

'If you press it I shall tell you, but you must not betray me to Sir Guy,' says Lilian, turning to include Lady Chetwoode in her caution. 'My ideal is always a lean old gentleman of about sixty, with a stoop, and any amount of determination. He has a hooked nose on which gold-rimmed spectacles eternally stride; eyes that look one through and through; a mouth

full of trite phrases, unpleasant maxims, and false teeth; and a decided tendency towards the suppression of all youthful follies.'

'Guy will be an agreeable surprise. I had no idea you could be so severe.'

'Nor am I. You must not think me so,' says Lilian, blushing warmly and looking rather sorry for having spoken; 'but you know you insisted on an answer. Perhaps I should not have spoken so freely, but that I knew my real guardian is not at all like my ideal.'

'How do you know? Perhaps he too is toothless, old, and unpleasant. He is a great deal older than I am.'

'He can't be a great deal older.'

'Why?'

'Because'—with a shy glance at the gentle face behind the urn—'Lady Chetwoode looks so young.'

She blushes again as she says this, and

regards her hostess with an air of such thorough good faith, as wins that lady's liking on the spot.

'You are right,' says Cyril, laughing; 'she *is* young. She is never to grow old, because her "boys," as she calls us, object to old women. You may have heard of "perennial spring;" well—that is another name for my mother. But you must not tell her so, because she is horribly conceited, and would lead us an awful life, if we didn't keep her down.'

'Cyril, my dear!' says Lady Chetwoode, laughing; which is about the heaviest reproof she ever delivers.

All this time, her breakfast being finished, Lilian has been carefully and industriously breaking up all the bread left upon her plate, until now quite a small pyramid stands in the centre of it.

Cyril, having secretly crumbled some of his, now, stooping forward, places it upon the top of her hillock.

'I haven't the faintest idea what you intend doing with it,' he says, 'but as I am convinced you have some grand project in view, I feel a mean desire to be associated with it in some way by having a finger in the pie. Is it for a pie? I am dying of vulgar curiosity.'

'I!'—with a little shocked start—'it doesn't matter. I—I quite forgot. I——'

She presses her hand nervously down upon the top of her goodly pile, and suppresses the gay little erection until it lies prostrate on her plate, where even then it makes a very fair show.

'You meant it for something, my dear, did you not?' asks Lady Chetwoode, kindly.

'Yes,' for the birds,' says the girl, turning

upon her two great earnest eyes that shine like stars through regretful tears. 'At home I used to collect all the broken bread for them every morning. And they grew so fond of me, the very robins used to come and perch upon my shoulders, and eat little bits from my lips. There was no one to frighten them. There was only me, and I loved them. When I knew I must leave the Park,' a sorrowful quiver making her voice sad—'I determined to break my going gently to them, and at first I only fed them every second day—in person—and then only every third day, and at last only once a week, until'—in a low tone—'they forgot me altogether.'

'Ungrateful birds,' says Cyril, with honest disgust, something like moisture in his own eyes, so real is her grief.

'Yes, that was the worst of all, to be so *soon* forgotten, and I had fed them without

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missing a day for five years. But they were not ungrateful: why should they remember me, when they thought I had tired of them? Yet I always broke the bread for them every morning, though I would not give it myself, and to-day'—she sighs—'I forgot I was not at home.'

'My dear,' says Lady Chetwoode, laying her own white, plump jewelled hand upon Lilian's slender, snowy one, as it lies beside her on the table, 'you flatter me very much when you say that even for a moment you felt this house home. I hope you will let the feeling grow in you, and will try to remember that here you have a true welcome for ever, until you wish to leave us. And as for the birds, I too love them—dear, pretty creatures—and I shall take it as a great kindness, my dear Lilian, if every morning you will gather up the crumbs, and give them to your little feathered friends.'

'How good you are!' says Lilian, gratefully, turning her small palm upwards so as to give Lady Chetwoode's hand a good squeeze. 'I know I shall be happy here. And I am so glad you like the birds; perhaps here they may learn to love me too. Do you know, before leaving the Park, I wrote a note to my cousin, asking him not to forget to give them bread every day—but young men are so careless'—in a disparaging tone—'I dare say he won't take the trouble to see about it.'

'I'm a young man,' remarks Mr. Chetwoode, suggestively.

'Yes, I know it,' returns Miss Chesney, coolly.

'I dare say your cousin will think of it,' says Lady Chetwoode, who has a weakness for young men, and always believes the best of them—'Archibald is very kind-hearted.'

'You know him?'—surprised.

'Very well indeed. He comes here almost every autumn to shoot with the boys. You know, his own home is not ten miles from Chetwoode.'

'I did not know. I never thought of him at all until I knew he was to inherit the Park. Do you think he will come here this autumn?'

'I hope so. Last year he was abroad, and we saw nothing of him; but now he has come home I am sure he will renew his visits. He is a great favourite of mine; I think you, too, will like him.'

'Don't be too sanguine,' says Lilian; 'just now I regard him as a usurper; I feel as though he had stolen my Park.'

'Marry him,' says Cyril, 'and get it back again. Some more tea, Miss—Lilian?'

'If you please—Cyril'—with a light laugh. 'You see, it comes easier to me than to you, after all.'

'*Place aux dames!* I felt some embarrassment about commencing. In the future I shall put my *mauvaise honte* in my pocket, and regard you as something I have always longed for—that is, a sister.'

'Very well, and you must be very good to me,' says Lilian, 'because, never having had one, I have a very exalted idea of what a brother should be.'

'How shall you amuse yourself all the morning, child?' asks Lady Chetwoode. 'I fear you're beginning by thinking us stupid.'

'Don't trouble about me,' says Lilian. 'If I may, I should like to go out, and take a run round the gardens alone. I can always make acquaintance with places quicker if left to find them out for myself.'

When breakfast is over, and they have all turned their backs with gross ingratitude upon

the morning-room, she dons her hat and sallies forth bent on discovery.

Through the gardens she goes, admiring the flowers, pulling a blossom or two, making love to the robins and sparrows, and gay little chaffinches, that sit aloft in the branches, and pour down sonnets on her head. The riotous butterflies, skimming hither and thither in the bright sunshine, hail her coming, and rush with wanton joy across her eyes, as though seeking to steal from them a lovelier blue for their soft wings. The flowers, the birds, the bees, the amorous wind, all woo this creature, so full of joy, and sweetness, and the unsurpassable beauty of youth.

She makes a rapid rush through all the hothouses, feeling almost stifled in them this day, so rich in sun; and, gaining the orchard, eats a little fruit, and makes a lasting conquest of Michael, the head gardener, who, when she

has gone into generous raptures over his arrangements, becomes her abject slave on the spot, and from that day forward acknowledges no power superior to hers.

Tiring of admiration, she leaves the garrulous old man, and wanders away over the closely-shaven lawn, past the hollies, into the wood beyond, singing as she goes, as is her wont.

In the deep green wood a delicious sense of freedom possesses her; she walks on, happy, unsuspicious of the evil to come, free of care (oh, that we all were so!) with nothing to chain her thoughts to earth, or compel her to dream of aught but the sufficing joy of living, the glad earth beneath her, the brilliant foliage around, the blue heavens above her head.

Alas! alas! how short is the time that lies between the child and the woman! the inter-

mediate state when, with awakened eyes, and arms outstretched, we inhale the anticipation of life, is as but one day in comparison with all the years of misery and uncertain pleasure to be eventually derived from the reality thereof!

Coming to a rather high wall Lilian pauses, but not for long. There are few walls either in Chetwoode or elsewhere likely to daunt Miss Chesney, when in the humour for exploring.

Putting one foot into a friendly crevice, and holding on valiantly to the upper stones, she climbs, and gaining the top gazes curiously around.

As she turns to survey the land over which she has travelled, a young man emerges from amongst the low-lying brushwood, and comes quickly forward. He is clad in a light grey suit of tweed, and has in his mouth a meerschaum pipe of the very latest design.

He is very tall, very handsome, thoughtful in expression. His hair is light brown—what there is of it—his barber having left him little to boast of except on the upper lip, where a heavy, drooping moustache of the same colour grows unrebuked. He is a little grave, a little indolent, a good deal passionate. The severe lines around his well-cut mouth are softened and counterbalanced by the extreme friendliness of his kind, dark eyes, that are so dark as to make one doubt whether their blue is not indeed black.

Lilian, standing on her airy perch, is still singing, and imparting to the surrounding scenery the sad story of 'Barb'ra Allen's' vile treatment of her adoring swain, and consequent punishment, when, the crackling of leaves beneath a human foot causing her to turn, she finds herself face to face with a stranger not a hundred yards away.

The song dies upon her lips, an intense desire to be elsewhere gains upon her. The young man in grey putting his meerschaum in his pocket, as a concession to this unexpected warbler, advances leisurely; and Lilian, feeling vaguely conscious that the top of a wall, though exalted, is not the most dignified situation in the world, trusting to her activity, springs to the ground, and regains with mother earth her self-respect.

'How could you be so foolish? I do hope you are not hurt,' says the grey young man, coming forward anxiously.

'Not in the least, thank you'—smiling so adorably that he forgets to speak for a moment or two. Then he says with some hesitation, as though in doubt:

'Am I addressing my—ward?'

'How can I be sure,' replies she, also in

doubt, 'until I know whether indeed you are my—guardian.'

'I am Guy Chetwoode,' says he laughing, and raising his hat.

'And I am Lilian Chesney,' replies she, smiling in return, and making him a pretty old-fashioned reverence.

'Then now I suppose we may shake hands without any breach of etiquette, and swear eternal friendship,' extending his hand.

'I shall reserve my oath until later on,' says Miss Chesney, demurely, but she gives him her hand nevertheless, with unmistakable *bon-homie*. 'You are going home?'—glancing up at him from under her broad-brimmed hat. 'If so I shall go with you, as I am a little tired.'

'But this wall,' says Guy, looking with considerable doubt upon the uncompromising barrier on the summit of which he has first seen her. 'Had we not better go round?'

'A thousand times no. What!'—gaily—'to be defeated by such a simple obstacle as that. I have surmounted greater difficulties than that wall many a time. If you will get up and give me your hands, I dare say I shall be able to manage it.'

Thus adjured, Guy climbs, and, gaining the top, stoops to give her the help desired; she lays her hands in his, and soon he draws her in triumph to his side.

'Now to get down,' he says, laughing. 'Wait.' He jumps lightly into the next field, and, turning, holds out his arms to her. 'You must not risk your neck a second time,' he says. 'When I saw you give that tremendous leap a minute ago, my blood froze in my veins. Such terrible exertion was never meant for—a fairy!'

'Am I so very small?' says Lilian. 'Well, take me down, then.'

She leans towards him, and gently, reverentially he takes her in his arms, and places her on the ground beside him. With such a slight burden to lift he feels himself almost a Hercules. The whole act does not occupy half a minute, and already he wishes vaguely it did not take so *very* short a time to bring a pretty woman from a wall to the earth beneath. In some vague manner he understands that for him the situation had its charm.

Miss Chesney is thoroughly unembarrassed.

'There is something in having a young guardian, after all,' she says, casting upon him a glance half shy, half merry, wholly sweet. She lays a faint emphasis upon the 'young.'

'You have had doubts on the subject, then?'

'Serious doubts. But I see there is truth in the old saying, that "there are few things so bad, but that they might have been worse."'

'Do you mean to tell me that I am "something bad"?'

'No'—laughing; 'how I wish I could. It is your superiority frightens me. I hear I must look on you as something superlatively good.'

'How shocking! And in what way am I supposed to excel my brethren?'

'In every way'—with a good deal of malice—'I have been bred in the belief that you are a *rara avis*, a model, a——'

'Your teachers have done me a great injury. I shudder when I contemplate the bitter awakening you must have when you come to know me better.'

'I hope so. I dare say'—naïvely—'I could learn to like you very well, if you proved on acquaintance a little less immaculate than I have been led to believe you.'

'I shall instantly throw over my pronounced

taste for the Christian virtues, and take steadily to vice,' says Guy with decision; 'will that satisfy your ladyship?'

'Perhaps you put it a little too strongly,' says Lilian demurely. 'By-the-bye'—irrelevantly—'what business took you from home yesterday?'

'I have to beg your pardon for that—my absence, I mean; but I could not help it. And it was scarcely business kept me absent,' confesses Chetwoode, who, if he is anything, is strictly honest, 'rather a promise to dine and sleep at some friends of ours, the Bellairs, who live a few miles from us.'

'Then it wasn't really that bugbear, business? I begin to revive,' says Miss Chesney.

'No; nothing half so healthy. I wish I had some more legitimate excuse to offer for my seeming want of courtesy, than the fact of my having to attend a prosy dinner; but I

haven't. I feel I deserve a censure, yet I hope you won't administer one when I tell you I found a very severe punishment in the dinner itself.'

'I forgive you,' says Lilian, with deep pity.

'It was a long-standing engagement, and though I knew what lay before me, I found I could not elude it any longer. I hate long engagements, don't you?'

'Cordially. But I should never dream of entering on one.'

'I did, unfortunately.'

'Then don't do it again.'

'I won't. Never. I finally make up my mind. At least, most certainly not for the days you may be expected.'

'I fear I'm a fixture'—ruefully—'you won't have to expect me again.'

'Don't say you fear it; I hope you will be happy here.'

'I hope so too, and I think it. I like your brother Cyril very much, and your mother is a darling.'

'And what am I?'

'Ask me that question a month hence?'

'Shall I tell you what I think of you?'

'If you wish,' says Lilian, indifferently, though in truth she is dying of curiosity.

'Well then, from the very first moment my eyes fell upon you, I thought to myself, she is without exception the most—— After all, though, I think I too shall reserve my opinion for a month or so.'

'You are right'—suppressing valiantly all outward symptoms of disappointment; 'your ideas then will be more formed. Are you fond of riding, Sir Guy?'

'Very. Are you?'

'Oh! am I not? I could ride from morning till night.'

'You are enthusiastic.'

'Yes'—with a saucy smile—'that is one of my many virtues. I think one should be thoroughly in earnest about everything one undertakes. Do you like dancing?'

'Rather. It entirely depends upon whom one may be dancing with. There are some people'—with a short but steady glance at her—'that I feel positive I could dance with for ever without knowing fatigue, or, what is worse, *ennui*. There are others——' an expressive pause. 'I have felt,' says Sir Guy, with visible depression, 'on certain occasions, as though I could commit an open assault on the band, because it would insist on playing its waltz from start to finish, instead of stopping after the first two bars, and thereby giving me a chance of escape.'

'Poor "others." I see you can be unkind when you choose.'

'But that is seldom, and only when driven to desperation. Are you fond of dancing? But of course you are—I need scarcely have asked. No doubt you could dance as well as ride from "morning until night."'

'You wrong me slightly. As a rule I prefer dancing from night until morning. You skate?'

'Beautifully!' with ecstatic fervour; 'I never saw any one who could skate as well.'

'No? You shan't be long so. Prepare for a downfall to your pride. I can skate better than any one in the world.'

Here they both laugh, and, turning, let their eyes meet. Instinctively they draw closer to each other, and a very kindly feeling springs into being.

'They maligned you,' says Lilian, softly, raising her lovely face, and gazing at him attentively, with a rather dangerous amount

of ingenuousness. 'I begin to fancy you are not so very terrific as they said. I dare say we shall be quite good friends after all.'

'I wish I was as sure of most things as I am of my own feeling on that point,' says Guy, with considerable warmth, holding out his hand.

She slips her cool, slim fingers into his, and smiles frankly. There they lie like little snow-flakes on his broad palm, and as he gazes on them a great and most natural desire to kiss them presents itself to his mind.

'I think we ought to ratify our vow of good-fellowship,' says he, artfully, looking at her as though to gain permission for the theft, and, seeing no rebuff in her friendly eyes, stoops and steals a little sweetness from the white hand he holds.

They are almost at the house by this time; and presently, gaining the drawing-room, find Lady Chetwoode sitting there awaiting them.

'Ah! Guy, you have returned,' cries she, well pleased.

'Yes, I found my guardian straying aimlessly in a great big wood, so I brought him home in triumph,' says Lilian's gay voice, who is in high good-humour. 'Is luncheon ready? Dear Lady Chetwoode, do not say I am late for the second time to-day.'

'Not more than five minutes, and you know we do not profess to live by rule. Run away, and take off your hat, child, and come back to me again.'

So Lilian does as she is desired, and runs away up the broad stairs in haste, to reduce her rebellious locks to order; yet so pleased is she with her *rencontre* with her guardian, and the want of ferocity he has displayed, and the general desirableness of his face and figure, that she cannot refrain from pausing midway in her career to apostrophise a dark-browed warrior

who glowers down upon her from one of the walls.

'By my halidame, and by my troth, and by all the wonderful oaths of your period, Sir Knight,' says she, smiling saucily, and dropping him a wicked curtsey, 'you have good reason to be proud of your kinsman. For, by Cupid, he is a monstrous handsome man, and vastly agreeable!'

After this astounding sally she continues her flight, and presently finds herself in her bedroom and almost in Nurse's arms.

'Lawks-a-mussy!' says that good lady with a gasp, putting her hand to her side, 'what a turn you did give me! Will the child never learn to walk?'

'I have seen him!' says Lilian, without preamble, only pausing to give Nurse a naughty little poke in the other side with a view to restoring her lost equilibrium.

'Sir Guy!' anxiously.

'Even so. The veritable and awful Sir Guy! And he isn't a bit awful in spite of all we heard; isn't that good news? and he is very handsome, and quite nice, and apparently can enjoy the world as well as another, and can do a naughty thing at a pinch; and I know he likes me by the expression of his eyes, and he actually unbended so far as to stoop to kiss my hand! There!' All this without stop or comma.

'Kissed your hand, my lamb! So soon! he did not lose much time. How the world does wag now-a-days!' says Nurse, holding aloft her hands in pious protest. 'Only to know you an hour or so, and to have the face to kiss your hand! Eh, but it's dreadful, it's brazen! I do hope this Sir Guy is not a wolf in sheep's clothing.'

'It was very good clothing, anyhow. There

is consolation in that. I could never like a man whose coat was badly cut. And his hands —I particularly noticed them—they are long, and well-shaped, and quite brown.'

'You seem mightily pleased with him on so short an acquaintance,' says Nurse, shrewdly. 'Brown hands, forsooth—and a shapely coat! Eh, child, but there's more wanting than that. Maybe it's thinking of being my Lady Guy you'll be, one of these days?'

'Nurse, I never met so brilliant a goose as you.—And would you throw away your lovely nursling upon a paltry baronet? Oh! shame! And yet'—teazingly—'one might do worse.'

'I'll tell you that, when I see him' says cautious Nurse, and, having given one last finishing touch to her darling's golden head, dismisses her to her luncheon, and the pernicious attentions of the daring wolf.

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CHAPTER VI.

Claud: 'In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.'—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

IT is that most satisfactory hour of all the twenty-four—dinner hour. Even yet the busy garish day has not quite vanished, but peeps in upon them curiously, through the open windows—upon Lady Chetwoode mild and gracious, upon the two young men, upon airy Lilian looking her bravest and bonniest in some transparent gown of sombre black, through which her fair young neck and arms gleam delicately.

Her only ornaments are roses—rich, soft white roses, gathered from the gardens outside; one, sweeter, and happier than its fellows, slumbers cosily in her golden hair.

Cyril and she sitting opposite to each other, smile, and jest and converse across the huge bowl of scented flowers that stands in the centre of the table, while Guy, who is a little silent, keeps wondering secretly whether every other woman has skin so dazzlingly fair, or eyes so blue, or hair so richly gilded.

'I have seen the widow,' he says at length, rousing himself to a sense of his own taciturnity. 'On my way home this morning, before I met you'—turning to Lilian—'I thought it my duty to look her up, and say I hoped she was comfortable, and all that.'

'And you saw her?' asks Cyril, regarding Guy attentively.

'Yes—she is extremely pretty, and ex-

tremely coy—cold I ought to say, as there didn't seem to be even the smallest spice of coquetry about her.'

'That's the safest beginning of all,' says Cyril confidentially to his mother, 'and no doubt the latest. I dare say she looked as though she thought he would never leave.'

'She did,' says Guy, laughing, 'and what is more unflattering, I am sure she meant it.'

'Clever woman!'

'However, if she intended what you think, she rather defeated her object; as I shan't trouble her again in a hurry. Can't bear feeling myself in the way.'

'Is she really pretty?' Cyril asks, curiously, though idly.

'Really; almost lovely.'

'Evidently a handsome family,' thinks Cyril. 'I wonder if he saw my friend, the sister, or step-sister, or companion.'

'She looks sad, too,' goes on Guy, 'and as though she had a melancholy story attached to her.'

'I do hope not, my dear,' interrupts his mother, uneasily. 'There is nothing so objectionable as a woman with a story. Later on one is sure to hear something wrong about her.'

'I agree with you,' Cyril says, promptly.

'I can't bear mysterious people. When in their society, I invariably find myself putting a check on my conversation, and blushing whenever I get on the topic of forgeries, burglaries, murders, elopements, and so forth. I never can keep myself from studying their faces when such subjects are mentioned, to see which it was had ruffled the peace of their existence. It is absurd, I know, but I can't help it, and it makes me uncomfortable.'

'Does this lady live in the wood, where I

met you?' asks Lilian, addressing Guy, and apparently deeply interested.

'Yes, about a mile from that particular spot. She is a new tenant we took to oblige a friend, but we know nothing about her.'

'How very romantic,' says Lilian; 'it is just like a story.'

'Yes; the image of the "Children of the Abbey," or "The Castle of Otranto,"' says Cyril. 'Has she any one living with her, Guy?' carelessly.

'Yes, two servants, and a small ill-tempered terrier.'

'I mean any friends. It must be dull to be by oneself.'

'I don't know. I saw no one. She don't seem ambitious about making acquaintances, as, when I said I hoped she would not find it lonely, and that my mother would have much pleasure in calling on her, she blushed painfully,

and said she was never lonely, and that she would esteem it a kindness if we would try to forget she was at the cottage.'

'That was rather rude, my dear, wasn't it?' says Lady Chetwoode, mildly.

'It sounds so, but as she said it, it wasn't rude. She appeared nervous, I thought, and as though she had but lately recovered from a severe illness. When the blush died away, she was as white as death.'

'Well, I shan't distress her by calling,' says Lady Chetwoode, who is naturally a little offended by the unknown's remark. Unconsciously she has been viewing her coming with distrust, and now this unpleasing message —for as a message directly addressed to herself she regards it—has had the effect of changing a smouldering doubt into an acknowledged dislike.

'I wonder how she means to employ her

time down here,' says Cyril. 'Scenery abounds, but lovely views don't go a long way with most people. After a while they are apt to pall.'

'Is there pretty scenery round Truston?' asks Lilian.

'Any amount of it. Like "Auburn," it is the "loveliest village of the plain." But I can't say we are a very enterprising people. Sometimes it occurs to one of us to give a dinner-party, but no sooner do we issue the invitations than we sit down and repent bitterly; and on rare occasions we may have a ball, which means a drive of fourteen miles on a freezing night, and universal depression and sneezing for a week afterwards. Perhaps the widow is wise in declining to have anything to do with our festive gatherings. I begin to think there is method in her madness.'

'Miss Chesney doesn't agree with you,' says Guy, casting a quick glance at Lilian; 'she

would go any distance to a ball, and dance from night till morning, and never know depression next day.'

'Is that true, Miss Chesney?'

'Sir Guy says it is,' replies Lilian, demurely.

'When I was young,' says Lady Chetwoode, 'I felt just like that. So long as the band played, so long I could dance; and without ever feeling fatigue. And provided he was of a good figure, and could dance well, I never much cared who my partner was, until I met your father. Dear me, how long ago it seems.'

'Not at all,' says Cyril, 'a mere reminiscence of yesterday. When I am an old gentleman, I shall make a point of never remembering anything that happened long ago, no matter how good it may have been.'

'Perhaps you won't have anything good to remember,' says Miss Lilian, provokingly.

'Guy, give Miss Chesney another glass of wine,' says Cyril, promptly, 'she is evidently feeling low.'

'Sir Guy,' says Miss Chesney with equal promptitude, and a treacherous display of innocent curiosity, 'when you were at Belmont last evening, did you hear Miss Bellair say anything of a rather rude attack made upon her yesterday at the station, by an ill-bred young man?'

'No,' says Sir Guy, rather amazed.

'Did she not speak of it? How strange. Why, I fancied——'

'Miss Chesney,' interposes Cyril, 'if you have any regard for your personal safety, you will refrain from further speech.'

'But why?'—opening her great eyes in affected surprise. 'Why may I not tell Sir Guy about it? Poor Miss Bellair! although a stranger to me, I felt most genuine pity for her.

Just fancy, Sir Guy, a poor girl alone upon a platform, without a soul to take care of her, what she must have endured, when a young man—*apparently* a gentleman—walked up to her, and, taking advantage of her isolated position, bowed to her, simpered impertinently, and was actually on the very point of addressing her, when fortunately her cousin came up and rescued her from her unhappy situation. Was it not shameful? Now, what do you think that rude young man deserved?'

'Extinction,' replies Guy without hesitation.

'I think so too. Don't you, Lady Chetwoode?'

Lady Chetwoode laughs.

'Now, I shall give my version of the story,' says Cyril. 'I too was present——'

'And didn't fly to her assistance? Oh, fie!' says Lilian.

'There was once an unhappy young man, who was sent to a station to meet a young woman, without having been told beforehand whether she was like Juno, tall enough to "snuff the moon," or whether she was so insignificant as to require a strong binocular to enable you to see her at all.'

'I am not insignificant,' says Lilian, her indignation getting the better of her judgment.

'Am I speaking of you, Miss Chesney?'

'Well, go on.'

'Now it came to pass, that as this wretched young man was glaring wildly around to see where his charge might be, he espied a tall young woman, apparently in the last stage of exhaustion, looking about for some one to assist her, and seeing no one else (for the one he sought had meanly, and with a view to his discomfiture, crept silently behind his back——'

'Oh, Cyril!'

'Yes, I maintain it; she crept silently behind his back, and bribed her maid to keep silence. So this wretched young man walked up to Juno, and pulled his forelock, and made his very best Sunday bow, and generally put his foot in it. Juno was so frightened by the best bow, that she gave way to a stifled scream, and instantly sank back unconscious into the arms of her betrothed, who just then ran frantically upon the scene. Upon this the deluded young man——'

'That will do,' interrupts Lilian, severely. 'I am certain I have read it somewhere before—and—people should always tell the truth.'

'By-the-bye,' says Guy, 'I believe Miss Bellair did say something last night about an unpleasant adventure at the station—something about a very low person who had got himself

up like a gentleman, but was without doubt one of the swell mob, and who——'

'You needn't go any further. I feel my position keenly. Nevertheless, Miss Bellair made a mistake when she rejected my proffered services. She little knows what a delightful companion I can be. Can't I, Miss Chesney?'

'Can he, Lady Chetwoode? I am not in a position to judge.'

'If a perpetual, never-ceasing flow of conversation has anything to do with it, I believe he must be acknowledged the most charming of his sex,' says his mother laughing, and, rising, bears away Lilian with her to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VII.

A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and waylay.
WORDSWORTH.

WHEN seven long uneventful days have passed away, every one at Chetwoode is ready to acknowledge that the coming of Lilian Chesney is an occurrence for which they ought to be devoutly thankful. She is a boon, a blessing, a merry sunbeam darting hither and thither about the old place; lighting up the shadows; dancing through the dark rooms; casting a little of her own inborn joyousness upon all that comes within her reach.

To Lady Chetwoode, who is fond of young life, she is especially grateful, and creeps into her kind heart in an incredibly short time, finding no impediment to check her progress.

Once a day, armed with huge gloves, and a gigantic scissors, Lady Chetwoode makes a tour of her gardens, snipping, and plucking, and giving superfluous orders to the attentive gardeners all the time. After her trots Lilian, supplied with a basket and a restless tongue that seldom wearies, but is always ready to suggest, or help the thought that sometimes comes slowly to her hostess.

'As you were saying last night, my dear Lilian——' says Lady Chetwoode, vaguely, coming to a full stop before the head gardener, and gazing at Lilian for further inspiration; she has evidently remembered only the smallest outline of what she wants to say.

'About the ivy on the north wall? You

wanted it thinned. You thought it a degree too straggling.'

'Yes—yes; of course. You hear, Michael, I want it clipped, and thinned, and—— There was something else about the ivy, my child, wasn't there?'

'You wished it mixed with the variegated kind—did you not?'

'Ah, of course. I wonder how I ever got on without Lilian,' says the old lady, gently pinching the girl's soft peach-like cheek. Florence, without doubt, is a comfort—but—she is not fond of gardening. Shall we come and take a peep at the grapes, dear?' And so on.

Occasionally too—being fond of living out of doors in the summer, and being a capital farmeress—Lady Chetwoode takes a quiet walk down to the home farm, to inspect all the latest arrivals. And here, too, Miss Lilian must needs follow.

There are twelve merry, showy little calves in one field, that run all together in their ungainly, jolting fashion up to the high gate that guards their domain, the moment Lady Chetwoode and her visitor arrive, under the mistaken impression that she and Lilian are a pair of dairy-maids coming to solace them with unlimited pans of milk.

Lilian cries 'Shoo!' at the top of her gay young voice, and instantly all the handsome, foolish things scamper away as though destruction were at their heels, leaving Miss Chesney delighted at the success of her own performance.

Then in the paddock there are four mad little colts to be admired, whose chief joy in life seems to consist in kicking their hind legs wildly into space, while their more sedate mothers stand apart, and compare notes upon their darlings' merits.

This paddock is Lilian's special delight, and all the way there, and all the way back, she chatters unceasingly, making the old lady's heart grow young again, as she listens to, and laughs at, all the merry stories Miss Chesney tells her of her former life.

To-day—although the morning has been threatening—is now quite fine. Tired of sulking, it cleared up half an hour ago, and is now throwing out a double portion of heat, as though to make up for its early deficiencies.

The—

> King of the East . . . girt
> With song and flame and fragrance, slowly lifts
> His golden feet on those empurpled stairs
> That climb into the windy halls of heaven,

and casting his million beams abroad, enlivens the whole earth.

It is a day when one might saunter but not walk, when one might dream though wide awake, when one is perforce amiable because

argument or contradiction would be too great an exertion.

Sir Guy—who has been making a secret though exhaustive search through the house for Miss Chesney—now turns his steps towards the orchard, where already instinct has taught him she is usually to be found.

He is not looking quite so *insouciant*, or carelessly happy, as when first we saw him, now two weeks ago; there is a little gnawing, dissatisfied feeling at his heart, for which he dare not account even to himself.

He thinks a good deal of his ward, and his ward thinks a good deal of him; but unfortunately their thoughts do not amalgamate harmoniously.

Towards Sir Guy Miss Chesney's actions have not been altogether just. Cyril she treats with affection, and the utmost *bonhomie*, but towards his brother—in spite of her civility on

that first day of meeting—she maintains a strict and irritating reserve.

He is her guardian (detestable, thankless office), and she takes good care neither he nor she shall ever forget that fact. Secretly she resents it, and openly gratifies that resentment by denying his authority in all things, and being specially wilful and wayward when occasion offers; as though to prove to him that she, for one, does not acknowledge his power over her.

Not that this ill-treated young man has the faintest desire to assert any authority whatever. On the contrary, he is most desirous of being all there is of the most submissive when in her presence; but Miss Chesney declines to see his humility, and chooses instead to imagine him capable of oppressing her with all sorts of tyrannical commands at a moment's notice.

There is a little cloud upon his brow as he reaches the garden, and walks moodily along its principal path. This cloud, however, lightens, and disappears, as upon the southern border he hears voices that tell him his search is at an end.

Miss Chesney's clear tones, rather raised and evidently excited, blend with those of old Michael Ronaldson, whose quavering bass is also uplifted, suggesting unwonted agitation on the part of this easy-going, though ancient gentleman.

Lilian is standing on tip-toe, opposite a plum-tree, with the long tail of her black gown caught firmly in one hand, while with the other she points frantically in a direction high above her head.

'Don't you see him,' she says, reproachfully, 'there—in that corner.'

'No, that I don't,' says Michael, blankly,

sheltering his forehead with both hands from the sun's rays, while straining his gaze anxiously towards the spot named.

'Not see him! Why he is a big one, a *monster*! Michael,' says Lilian, reproachfully, 'you are growing either stupid or short-sighted, and I didn't expect it from you. Now follow the tip of my finger; look right along it; now—now—' with growing excitement, 'don't you see it?'

'I do, I do,' says the old man, enthusiastically; 'wait till I get 'en—won't I pay 'en off!'

'Is it a plum you want?' asks Guy, who has come up behind her, and is lost in wonder at what he considers is her excitement about the fruit. 'Shall I get it for you?'

'A plum, no—it is a snail I want,' says Lilian eagerly, 'but I can't get at it. Oh! that I had been born five inches taller. Ronaldson,

you are not tall enough; Sir Guy will catch him.'

Sir Guy, having brought a huge snail to the ground, presents him gravely to Lilian.

'That is the twenty-third we have caught to-day,' says she, 'and twenty-nine yesterday—in all forty-eight. Isn't it Michael?'

'I think it makes fifty-two,' suggests Sir Guy, deferentially.

'Does it? Well it makes no difference,' says Miss Chesney, with a fine disregard of arithmetic; 'at all events, either way, it is a tremendous number. I'm sure I don't know where they come from'—despairingly—'unless they all walk back again during the night.'

'And I wouldn't wonder too,' says Michael, *sotto voce.*

'Walk back again!' repeats Guy, amazed. 'Don't you kill them?'

'Miss Chesney won't hear of 'en being

killed, Sir Guy,' says old Ronaldson, sheepishly; 'she says as 'ow the cracklin' of 'en do make her feel sick all over.'

'Oh! yes,' says Lilian, making a little wry face, 'I hate to think of it. He used to crunch them under his heel, so,' with a shudder, and a small stamp upon the ground, 'and it used to make me absolutely faint. So we gave it up, and now we just throw them over the wall, so' —suiting the action to the word, and flinging the slimy creature she holds with dainty disgust, between her first finger and thumb, over the garden boundary.

Guy laughs, and thus encouraged, so does old Michael.

'Well, at all events, it must take them a long time to get back,' says Lilian, apologetically.

'On your head be it if we have no vegetables or fruit this year,' says Chetwoode, who

understands as much about gardening as the man in the moon, but thinks it right to say something. 'Come for a walk, Lilian, will you? It is a pity to lose this charming day.' He speaks with marked diffidence (his lady's mood's being uncertain), which so far gains upon Miss Chesney, that in return she deigns to be gracious.

'I don't mind if I do,' she replies with much civility. 'Good-morning, Michael;' and with a pretty little nod, and a still prettier smile in answer to the old man's low salutation, she walks away beside her guardian.

Far into the woods they roam, the teeming woods all green and bronze and copper-coloured, content and happy in that no actual grief disturbs them.

> The branches cross above their eyes,
> The skies are in a net;

the fond gay birds are warbling their tenderest

strains. 'Along the grass sweet airs are blown,' and all the myriad flowers, the 'little wildings' of the forest, 'earth's cultureless buds,' are expanding and glowing, and exhaling the perfumed life that their mother, Nature, has given them.

Chetwoode is looking its best and brightest, and Sir Guy might well be proud of his possessions; but no thought of them enters his mind just now, which is filled to overflowing with the image of this petulant, pretty, saucy, lovable ward, that fate has thrown into his path.

'Yes, it is a lovely place!' says Lilian after a pause spent in admiration. She has been looking around her, and has fallen into honest though silent raptures over all the undulating parks and uplands that stretch before her far as the eye can see. 'Lovely!—So,' with a sigh, 'was my old home.'

'Yes. I think quite as lovely as this.'

'What!' turning to him with a start, while the rich, warm, eager flush of youth springs to her cheeks and mantles there, 'you have been there? You have seen the Park?'

'Yes, very often, though not for years past. I spent many a day there when I was younger. I thought you knew it.'

'No, indeed. It makes me glad to think some one here can remember its beauties with me. But yet you cannot know it all as I do; you never saw my own particular bit of wood?' With earnest questioning, as though seeking to deny the hope that strongly exists—'It lies behind the orchard, and one can get to it by passing through a little gate in the wall, that leads into the very centre of it. There at first, in the heart of the trees, one sees a tangled mass with giant branches overhanging it, and straggling blackberry bushes protecting

it with their angry arms, and just inside, the coolest, greenest, freshest bit of grass in all the world—my fairy nook I used to call it. But you—of course you never saw it.'

'It has a huge horse-chestnut at its head, and a silver fir at its feet.'

'Yes—yes!'

'I know it well,' says Chetwoode, smiling at her eagerness. 'It was your mother's favourite spot. You know she and my mother were fast friends, and she was very fond of me. When first she was married, before you were born, I was constantly at the Park, and afterwards too. She used to read in the spot you name, and I —I was a delicate little fellow at that time, obliged to lie a good deal, and I used to read there beside her with my head in her lap, by the hour together.

'Why, you know more about my mother

than I do!' says Lilian, with some faint envy in her tones.

'Yes'—hastily, having already learned how little a thing can cause an outbreak when one party is bent on war—'but you must not blame me for that. I could not help it.'

'No'—regretfully—'I suppose not. Before I was born, you say. How old that seems to make you!'

'Why?'—laughing—'Because I was able to read eighteen years ago? I was only nine, or perhaps ten, then.'

'I never could do my sums,' says Lilian, 'I only know it sounds as though you were the Ancient Mariner, or Methuselah, or anybody in the last stage of decay.'

'And yet I am not so very old, Lilian. I am not yet thirty.'

'Well, that's old enough. When I am thirty I shall take to caps with borders, and

spectacles, and long black mittens, like Nurse. Ha, ha!' laughs Lilian, delighted at the portrait of herself she has drawn, 'shan't I look nice then?'

'I dare say you will,' says Guy, quite seriously. 'But I would advise you to put off the wearing of them for a while longer. I don't think thirty old.'

'That is because you have arrived at that unpleasant age.'

'I have not, quite.'

'A month or two don't signify'—provokingly; 'and as you have had apparently a very good life I don't think it manly of you to fret because you are drawing to the close of it. Some people would call it mean. There, never mind your age, tell me something more about my mother. Did you love her?'

'One could not help loving her. She was so gentle, so thoroughly kindhearted.'

'Ah! what a pity it is I don't resemble her,' says Lilian, with a suspiciously deep sigh, accepting the reproach, and shaking her blonde head mournfully. 'Was she like that large picture at home in the drawing-room? I hope not. It is very lovely, but it lacks expression, and has no tenderness about it.'

'Then the artist must have done her great injustice. She was all tenderness both in face and disposition as I remember her, and children are very correct in their impressions. She was extremely beautiful. You are very like her.'

'Am I, Sir Guy? Oh, thank you. I didn't hope for so much praise. Then in one thing at least I do resemble my mother. Am I more beautiful or less so?'

'That is quite a matter of opinion.'

'And what is yours?' saucily.

'What can it matter to you?' he says

quickly, almost angrily. 'Besides, I dare say you know it.'

'I don't indeed. Never mind, I shall find out for myself. I am so glad'—amiably—'you knew my mother, and the dear Park! It sounds horrible, does it not, but the Park is even more dear to me than—than her memory.'

'You can scarcely call it a "memory;" she died when you were so young—hardly old enough to have an idea. I recollect you so well, a little toddling thing of two.'

'The plot thickens. You knew *me* also? And pray, Sir Guardian, what was I like?'

'You had blue eyes, and a fair skin; a very imperious will, and the yellowest hair I ever saw.'

'A graphic description! It would be madness on the part of any one to steal me, as I should infallibly be discovered by it. Well, I have not altered much. I have still my eyes,

and my hair, and my will, only perhaps rather more of the latter. Go on, you are very unusually interesting to-day, I had no idea you possessed such a fund of information. Were you very fond of me?'

'Very,' says Chetwoode, laughing in spite of himself. 'I was your slave, as long as I was with you. Your lightest wish was my law. I used even——'

A pause.

'Yes, do go on, I am all attention. "I used even——"'

'I was going to say I used to carry you about in my arms, and kiss you into good humour when you were angry, which was pretty often,' replies Guy with a rather forced laugh, and a decided accession of colour; 'but I feared such a very grown-up young lady as you might be offended.'

'Not in the least—' with a gay, perfectly

unembarrassed enjoyment at his confusion—'I never heard anything so amusing. Fancy you being my nurse once on a time. I feel immensely flattered when I think such an austere individual actually condescended to hold me in his arms and kiss me into good humour. It is more than I have any right to expect. I am positively overwhelmed. By-the-bye, had your remedy the desired effect? Did I subdue my naughty passions under your treatment?'

'As far as I can recollect, yes,' rather stiffly. Nobody likes being laughed at.

'How odd!' says Miss Chesney.

'Not very,' retorts he—'at that time *you* were very fond of *me*.'

'That is even odder,' says Miss Chesney, who takes an insane delight in teazing him. 'What a pity it is you cannot invent some plan for reducing me to order now.'

'There are some tasks too great for a mere mortal to undertake,' replies Sir Guy, calmly.

Miss Chesney, not being just then prepared with a crushing retort, wisely refrains from speech altogether, although it is by a superhuman effort she does so. Presently, however, lest he should think her overpowered by the irony of his remark, she says quite pleasantly:

'Did Cyril ever see me before I came here?'

'No.' Then abruptly — 'Do you like Cyril?'

'Oh, immensely! He suits me wonderfully, he is so utterly devoid of dignity, and all that. One need not mind what one says to Cyril; in his worst mood he could not terrify. Whereas his brother——' with a little malicious gleam from under her long, heavy lashes.

'Well, what of his brother?'

'Nay, Sir Guy, the month we agreed on

has not yet expired,' says Lilian. 'I cannot tell you what I think of you yet. Still, you cannot imagine how dreadfully afraid I am of you at times.'

'If I believed you, it would cause me great regret,' says her guardian, rather hurt. 'I am afraid, Lilian, your father acted unwisely when he chose Chetwoode as a home for you.'

'What! are you tired of me already?' asks she hastily, with a little tremor in her voice, that might be anger, and that might be pain.

'Tired of you? No! But I cannot help seeing that the fact of my being your guardian makes me abhorrent to you.'

'Not quite that,' says Miss Chesney in a little soft, repentant tone; 'what a curious idea to get into your head; dismiss it, there is really no reason why it should remain.'

'You are sure?' with rather more earnestness than the occasion demands.

'Quite sure. And now tell me how it was I never saw you until now, since I was two years old.'

'Well, for one thing, your mother died; then I went to Eton, to Cambridge, got a commission in the Dragoons, tired of it, sold out, and am now as you see me.'

'What an eventful history,' says Lilian, laughing.

At this moment, who should come towards them, beneath the trees, but Cyril, walking as though for a wager.

'"Whither awa?"' asks Miss Lilian, gaily stopping him with outstretched hands.

'You have spoiled my quotation,' says Cyril, reproachfully, 'and it was on the very tip of my tongue, I call it disgraceful. I was going to say with fine effect, "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" but I fear it would fall rather flat if I said it now.'

'Rather. Nevertheless, I accept the compliment. Are you in training? or where are you going in such a hurry?'

'A mere constitutional,' says Cyril, lightly—which is a base and ready lie. 'Good-bye, I won't detain you longer. Long ago I learned the useful lesson, that where "two is company, three is trumpery." Don't look as though you would like to devour me, Guy; I meant no harm.'

Lilian laughs, so does Guy, and Cyril continues his hurried walk.

'Where does that path lead to?' asks Lilian, looking after him as he disappears rapidly in the distance.

'To the cottage first, and then to the gamekeeper's lodge, and farther on to another entrance-gate that opens on the road.'

'Perhaps he will see your pretty tenant on his way?'

'I hardly think so. It seems she never goes beyond her own garden.'

'Poor thing! I feel the greatest curiosity about her, indeed I might say an interest in her. Perhaps she is unhappy.'

'Perhaps so; though her manner is more frozen than melancholy. She is almost forbidding, she is so cold.'

'She may be in ill-health.'

'She may be,' unsympathetically.

'You do not seem very prepossessed in her favour,' says Lilian, impatiently.

'Well, I confess I am not,' carelessly. 'Experience has taught me that when a woman withdraws persistently from the society of her own sex, and eschews the companionship of her fellow-creatures, there is sure to be something radically wrong with her.'

'But you forget there are exceptions to

every rule. I confess I would give anything to see her,' says Lilian, warmly.

'I don't believe you would be the gainer by that bargain,' replies he with conviction, being oddly, unaccountably prejudiced against this silent, undemonstrative widow.

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Meantime Cyril pursues his way along the path, that every day of late he has travelled with unexampled perseverance. Seven times he has passed along it full of hope, and only twice has been rewarded with a bare glimpse of the fair unknown, whose face has obstinately haunted him since his first meeting with it.

On these two momentous occasions she has appeared to him so pale and wan, that he is fain to believe the colour he saw in her cheeks on that first day arose from vexation and excitement, rather than health—a conclusion that fills him with alarm.

Now as he nears the house, between the interstices of the hedge he catches the gleam of a white gown moving to and fro, that surely covers his divinity.

Time proves sih surmise right. It is the admired incognita, who, almost as he reaches the gate that leads to her bower, comes up to one of the huge rose-bushes that decorate either side of it, and—unconscious of criticism —commences to gather from it such flowers as shall add beauty to the bouquet already growing large within her hands.

Presently the restless feeling that makes us all know when some unexpected presence is near, compels her to raise her head. Thereupon her eyes and those of Cyril Chetwoode meet. She pauses in her occupation as though irresolute; Cyril pauses too; and then gravely, unsmilingly, she bows to him in cold recogni-

tion. Certainly her reception is not encouraging; but Cyril is not to be daunted.

'I hope,' he says, deferentially, 'your little dog has been conducting himself with due propriety since last I had the pleasure of restoring him to your arms?'

This Grandisonian speech surely calls for a reply.

'Yes,' says Incognita, graciously. 'I think it was only the worry caused by change of scene made him behave so very badly that—last day.'

So saying, she turns from him, as though anxious to give him a gentle *congé*. But Cyril, driven to desperation, makes one last effort at detaining her.

'I hope your friend is better,' he says, leaning his arms upon the top of the gate, and looking full of anxiety about the absent widow.

'My brother—Sir Guy—called the other day, and said she appeared extremely delicate.'

'My friend?' staring at him in marked surprise, while a faint deep rose flush illumines her cheek, making one forget how white and fragile she appeared a moment since.

'Yes. I mean Mrs. Arlington, our tenant. I am Cyril Chetwoode,' raising his hat. 'I hope the air here will do her good.'

He is talking against time, but she is too much occupied to notice it.

'I hope it will,' she replies, calmly, studying her roses attentively, while the faintest suspicion of a smile grows and trembles at the corners of her mobile lips.

'You are her sister, perhaps?' asks Cyril, the extreme deference of his whole manner taking from the rudeness of his questioning.

'No—not.her sister.'

'Her friend?'

'Yes. Her dearest friend,' replies Incognita, slowly, after a pause, and a closer, more prolonged examination of her roses; while again the curious half-suppressed smile lights up her face. There are few things prettier on a pretty face than an irrepressible smile.

'She is fortunate in possessing such a friend,' says Cyril, softly; then with some haste, as though anxious to cover his last remark, 'my brother did not see you when he called?'

'Did he say so?'

'No. He merely mentioned having seen only Mrs. Arlington. I do not think he is aware of your existence.'

'I think he is. I have had the pleasure of speaking with Sir Guy.'

'Indeed!' says Cyril, and instantly tells himself he would not have suspected Guy of so much slyness. 'Probably it was some day since—you met him——'

'No, it was on that one occasion when he called here.'

'I dare say I misunderstood,' says Cyril, 'but I certainly thought he said he had seen only Mrs. Arlington.'

'Well?'

'Well?'

'*I* am Mrs. Arlington!'

'What!' says Cyril with exaggerated surprise—and a moment later is shocked at the vehemence of his own manner. 'I beg your pardon, I'm sure,' he says, contritely; 'there is no reason why it should not be so, but you seem so—I had no idea you were a—that is—I mean I did not think you were married.'

'You had no idea I was a widow,' corrects Mrs. Arlington, coldly. 'I do not see why you need apologise. On the contrary, I consider you have paid me a compliment. I

am glad I do not look the character. Good morning, sir; I have detained you too long already.'

'It is I who have detained you, Madam,' says Cyril, speaking coldly also, being a little vexed at the tone she has employed towards him, feeling it to be undeserved. 'I fear I have been unhappy enough to err twice this morning—though I trust you will see—unwittingly.' He accompanies this speech with a glance so full of entreaty, and a mute desire for friendship, as must go straight to the heart of any true woman; after which, being a wise young man, he attempts no further remonstrance, but lifts his hat, and walks away gloomily towards his home.

Mrs. Arlington, who is not proof against so much reproachful humility, lifts her head, sees the dejected manner of his departure, and is greatly struck by it. She makes one step

forward; checks herself; opens her lips as though to speak; checks herself again; and finally, with a little impatient sigh, turns and walks off gloomily towards her home.

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CHAPTER VIII.

And sang, with much simplicity,—a merit
Not the less precious, that we seldom hear it.
DON JUAN.

THE rain is beating regularly, persistently, against the window-panes; there is no hope of wandering afield this evening. A sullen summer shower, without a smile in it, is deluging gardens and lawns, tender flowers and gravelled walks, and is blotting out angrily all the glories of the landscape.

It is half-past four o'clock. Lady Chetwoode is sitting in the library reclining in the cosiest armchair the room contains, with her

knitting as usual in her hands. She disdains all newer, lighter modes of passing the time, and knits diligently all day long for her poor.

Lilian is standing at the melancholy window, counting the diminutive lakes and toy pools forming in the walk outside. As she looks, a laurel leaf, blown from the nearest shrubbery, falls into a fairy river and floats along in its current like a sedate and sturdy boat, with a small snail for cargo, that clings to it bravely for dear life.

Presently a stick, that to Lilian's idle fancy resolves itself into an ironclad, runs down the poor little skiff, causing it to founder with all hands on board.

At this heartrending moment John enters with the tea-tray, and drawing a small table before Lady Chetwoode, lays it thereon. Her ladyship, with a sigh, prepares to put away her beloved knitting; hesitates, and then is lost,

in-so-far that she elects to finish that most mysterious of all things, the rounding of the heel of her sock, before pouring out the tea. Old James Murland will be expecting these good grey socks by the end of the week, and old James Murland must not be disappointed.

'Lady Chetwoode,' says Lilian with soft hesitation, 'I want to ask you a question.'

'Do you, dear? Then ask it.'

'But it is a very odd question, and perhaps you will be angry.'

'I don't think I shall,' says Lady Chetwoode ('One, two, three, four,' &c.)

'Well then, I like you so much—I love you so much,' corrects Lilian, earnestly, 'that if you don't mind, I should like to call you some name a little less formal than Lady Chetwoode. Do you mind?'

Her ladyship lays down her knitting and looks amused.

'It seems no one cares to give me my title,' she says. 'Mabel, my late ward, was hardly here three days, when she made a request similar to yours. She always called me "Auntie." Florence calls me, of course, "Aunt Anne"; but Mabel always called me "Auntie."'

'Ah! that was prettier. May I call you "Auntie" too? "Auntie Nannie"—I think that a dear little name, and just suited to you.'

'Call me anything you like, darling,' says Lady Chetwoode, kissing the girl's soft, flushed cheek.

Here the door opens to admit Sir Guy and Cyril, who are driven to desperation and afternoon tea by the incivility of the weather,

'The mother and Lilian spooning,' says Cyril. 'I verily believe women, when alone, kiss each other for want of something better.'

'I have been laughing at Lilian,' says Lady Chetwoode; 'she, like Mabel, cannot be happy unless she finds for me a pet name. So I am to be "Auntie" to her too.'

'I am glad it is not to be "Aunt Anne" like Florence,' says Cyril with a distasteful shrug; 'that way of addressing you always grates upon my ear.'

'By-the-bye, that reminds me,' says Lady Chetwoode, struggling vainly in her pocket to bring to light something that isn't there. 'Florence is coming home next week. I had a letter from her this morning telling me so, but I forgot all about it till now.'

'You don't say so!' says Cyril in a tone of unaffected dismay.

Now when one hears an unknown name mentioned frequently in conversation, one eventually grows desirous of knowing something about the owner of that name.

Lilian therefore gives way to curiosity.

'And who is Florence?' she asks.

'"Who is Florence?"' repeats Cyril; 'have you really asked the question? Not to know Florence argues yourself unknown. She is an institution. But I forgot, you are one of those unhappy ones outside the pale of Florence's acquaintance. How I envy—I mean pity you!'

'Florence is my niece,' says Lady Chetwoode; 'she is at present staying with some friends in Shropshire, but she lives with me. She has been here ever since she was seventeen.'

'Is that very long ago?' asks Lilian, and her manner is so naïve that they all smile.

'She came here——' begins Lady Chetwoode.

'She came here,' interrupts Cyril, impressively, 'precisely five years ago. Have you

mastered that date? If so, cling to it, get it by heart, never lose sight of it. Once, about a month ago, before she left us to go to those good-natured people in Shropshire, I told her, quite accidentally, I thought she came here *nine* years ago. She was very angry, and I then learned that Florence angry wasn't nice, and that a little of her in that state went a long way. I also learned that she came here five years ago.'

'Am I to understand,' asks Lilian, laughing, 'that she is twenty-six?'

'My dear Lilian, I do hope you are not "obtoose." Has all my valuable information been thrown away? I have all this time been trying to impress upon you the fact that Florence is only twenty-two, but it is evidently "love's labour lost." Now do try to comprehend. She was twenty-two last year, she is twenty-two this year, and I am almost positive that

this time next year she will be twenty-two again!'

'Cyril, don't be severe,' says his mother.

'Dearest mother, how can you accuse me of such a thing. Is it severe to say Florence is still young and lovely?'

'Do you and Florence like each other?' asks Lilian.

'Not too much. I am not staid enough for Florence. She says she likes earnest people—like Guy.'

'Ah!' says Lilian.

'What?' Guy hearing his name mentioned looks up dreamily from the 'Times' in the folds of which he has been buried. 'What about me?'

'Nothing. I was only telling Lilian in what high esteem you are held by our dear Florence.'

'Is that all?' says Guy, indifferently, going

back to the thrilling account of the divorce case he has been studying.

'What a very ungallant speech!' says Miss Chesney, with a view to provocation, regarding him curiously.

'Was it?' says Guy, meeting her eyes, and letting the interesting paper slip to the floor beside him. 'It was scarcely news, you see, and there is nothing to be wondered at. If I lived with people for years, I am certain I should end by being attached to them, were they good or bad.'

'She doesn't waste much of her liking upon me,' says Cyril.

'Nor you on her. She is just the one pretty woman I ever knew to whom you didn't succumb.'

'You didn't tell me she was pretty,' says Lilian, hastily, looking at Cyril with keen reproach.

'"Handsome is as handsome does," and the charming Florence makes a point of treating me very unhandsomely. You won't like her, Lilian, make up your mind to it.'

'Nonsense, don't let yourself be prejudiced by Cyril's folly,' says Guy.

'I am not easily prejudiced,' replies Lilian somewhat coldly, and instantly forms an undying dislike to the unknown Florence. 'But she really is pretty?' she asks again, rather persistently addressing Cyril.

'Lovely!' superciliously. 'But ask Guy all about her; he knows.'

'Do you?' says Lilian, turning her large eyes upon Guy.

'Not more than other people,' replies he, calmly, though there is a perceptible note of irritation in his voice, and a rather vexed gleam in his blue eyes as he lets them fall upon

his unconscious brother. 'She is certainly not lovely.'

'Then she is very pretty?'

'Nor even *very* pretty in my eyes,' replies Sir Guy, who is inwardly annoyed at the examination. Without exactly knowing why, he feels he is behaving shabbily to the absent Florence. 'Still, I have heard many men call her so.'

'She is decidedly pretty,' says Lady Chetwoode with decision, 'but rather pale.'

'Would you call it pale?' says Cyril with suspicious earnestness. 'Well, of course that may be the new name for it, but I always called it sallow.'

'Cyril, you are incorrigible. At all events, I miss her in a great many ways,' says Lady Chetwoode, and they who listen fully understand the tone of self-reproach that runs beneath her words in that she cannot bring herself to miss

Florence in all her ways. 'She used to pour out the tea for me, for one thing.'

'Let me do it for you, Auntie,' says Lilian, springing to her feet with alacrity, while the new name trips melodiously and naturally from her tongue. 'I never poured out tea for anyone, and I should like to immensely.'

'Thank you, my dear, I shall be much obliged; I can't bear to leave off this sock now I have got so far. And who, then, used to pour out tea for you at your own home?'

'Nurse, always. And for the last six months, ever since'—with a gentle sigh—'poor Papa's death, Aunt Priscilla.'

'That is Miss Chesney?'

'Yes. But tea was never nice with Aunt Priscilla; she liked it weak, because of her nerves, she said (though I don't think she had many), and she always would use the biggest cups in the house, even in the evening.

There never,' says Lilian solemnly, 'was anyone so odd as my Aunt Priscilla. Though we had several of the loveliest sets of china in the world she never would use them, and always preferred a horrid glaring set of blue and gold that was my detestation. Taffy and I were going to smash them all one day right off, but then we thought it would be shabby, she had placed her affections so firmly on them. Is your tea quite right, Lady Chetwoode—Auntie I mean'—with a bright smile—'or do you want any more sugar?'

'It is quite right, thank you, dear.'

'Mine is without exception the most delicious cup of tea I ever tasted,' says Cyril with intense conviction. Whereat Lilian laughs, and promises him as many more as he can drink.

'Will you not give me one?' says Guy, who has risen and is standing beside her, look-

ing down upon her lovely face with a strange expression in his eyes.

How pretty she looks pouring out the tea, with that little assumption of importance about her! How deftly her slender fingers move amongst the cups, how firmly they close around the handle of the quaint old teapot!

A lump of sugar falls with a small crash into the tray. It is a refractory lump, and runs in and out amongst the china and the silver jugs, refusing to be captured by the tongs. Lilian, losing patience (her stock of it is small), lays down the useless tongs, and taking up the lump between a dainty finger and thumb, transfers it triumphantly to her own cup.

'Well caught,' says Cyril, laughing, while it suddenly occurs to Guy that Florence would have died before she would have done such a thing. The sugar-tongs was made to pick up the sugar, therefore it would be a flagrant

breach of system to use anything else, and of all other things one's fingers! Oh! horrible thought!

Methodical Florence. Unalterable, admirable, tiresome Florence!

As Sir Guy speaks, Lilian, being in one of her capricious moods, which seem reserved alone for her guardian, half turns her head towards him, and looking at him out of two great unfriendly eyes, says:

'Is not that yours?' pointing to a cup that she has purposely placed at a considerable distance from her, so that she may have a decent excuse for not offering it to him with her own hands.

'Thank you,' Chetwoode says, calmly, taking it without betraying the chagrin he is foolish enough to feel, but he is very careful not to trouble her a second time. It is evident to him that, for some reason or reasons unknown,

he is in high disgrace with his ward; though long ago he has given up trying to discover just cause for her constant displays of temper.

Lady Chetwoode is knitting industriously. Already the heel is turned, and she is on the fair road to make a most successful and rapid finish. Humanly speaking, there is no possible doubt about old James Murland being in possession of the socks to-morrow evening. As she knits she speaks in the low dreamy tone that always seems to me to accompany the click of the needles.

'Florence sings very nicely,' she says; 'in the evening it was pleasant to hear her voice. Dear me, how it does rain, to be sure; one would think it never meant to cease. Yes, I am very fond of singing.'

'I have rather a nice little voice,' says Miss Chesney, composedly—'at least—' with a sudden and most unlooked-for accession of modesty—

'they used to say so at home. Shall I sing something for you, Auntie? I should like to very much, if it would give you any pleasure.'

'Indeed it would, my dear. I had no idea you were musical.'

'I don't suppose I can sing as well as Florence'—apologetically—'but I will try the "Banks of Allan Water," and then you will be able to judge for yourself.'

She sits down, and sings from memory that very sweet and dear old song—sings it with all the girlish tenderness of which she is capable, in a soft, sweet voice, that saddens as fully as it charms—a voice that would certainly never raise storms of applause, but is perfect in its truthfulness, and exquisite in its youth and freshness.

'My dear child, you sing rarely well,' says Lady Chetwoode, while Guy has drawn near,

unconsciously to himself, and is standing at a little distance behind her. How many more witcheries has this little tormenting syren laid up in store for his undoing? 'It reminds me of long ago,' says Auntie, with a sigh for the gay hours gone; 'once I sang that song myself. Do you know any Scotch airs, Lilian? I am so fond of them.'

Whereupon Lilian sings 'Comin' thro' the Rye' and 'Caller Herrin,' which latter brings tears into Lady Chetwoode's eyes. Altogether, by the time the first dressing-bell rings, she feels she has made a decided success, and is so far elated by the thought, that she actually condescends to forego her ill-temper for this occasion only, and bestows so gracious a smile and speech upon her hapless guardian, as sends that ill-used young man to his room in radiant spirits.

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CHAPTER IX.

So young, and so untender.—KING LEAR.

'I WONDER why on earth it is some people cannot choose proper hours in which to travel,' says Cyril, testily. 'The idea of electing—(not any more, thank you)—to arrive at ten o'clock at night at any respectable house is barely decent.'

'Yes, I wish she had named any other hour,' says Lady Chetwoode. 'It is rather a nuisance Guy having to go to the station so late.

'Dear Florence is so romantic,' remarks Cyril; 'let us hope for her sake there will be a moon.'

It is half-past eight o'clock, and dinner is nearly over. There has been some haste this evening on account of Miss Beauchamp's expected arrival; the very men who are handing round the jellies and sweetmeats seem as inclined to hurry as their pomposity will allow: hence Cyril's mild ill-humour. No man but feels aggrieved when compelled to hasten at his meals.

Miss Chesney has arrayed herself with great care for the new comer's delectation, and has been preparing herself all day to dislike her cordially. Sir Guy is rather silent; Cyril is not; Lady Chetwoode's usual good spirits seem to have forsaken her.

'Are you really going to Truston after dinner?' asks Lilian in a tone of surprise, addressing Sir Guy.

'Yes, really; I do not mind it in the least,' answering his mother's remark even more than

hers. 'It can scarcely be called a hardship, taking a short drive on such a lovely night.'

'Of course not, with the prospect before him of so soon meeting this delightful cousin,' thinks Lilian. 'How glad he seems to welcome her home. No fear he would let Cyril meet *her* at the station!'

'Yes, it certainly is a lovely evening,' she says aloud. Then—'Was there no other train for her to come by?'

'Plenty,' answers Cyril, 'any number of them. But she thought she would like Guy to "meet her by moonlight alone."'

It is an old and favourite joke of Cyril's, Miss Beauchamp's admiration for Guy. He has no idea he is encouraging in anyone's mind the impression that Guy has an admiration for Miss Beauchamp.

'I wonder you never tire of that subject,' Guy says, turning upon his brother with sudden

and most unusual temper. 'I don't fancy Florence would care to hear you for ever making free with her name as you do.'

'I beg your pardon a thousand times. I had no idea it was a touchy subject with you.'

'Nor is it,' shortly.

'She will have her wish,' says Lilian, alluding to Cyril's unfortunate quotation, and ignoring the remark that followed. 'I am sure it will be moonlight by ten'—making a critical examination of the sky through the window, near which she is sitting. 'How charming moonlight is! If I had a lover—' laughing—'I should never go for a drive or a walk with him except beneath its cool, white rays. I think Miss Beauchamp very wise in choosing the hour she has chosen for her return home.'

This is intolerable. The inference is quite distinct. Guy flushes crimson and opens his

mouth to give way to some of the thoughts that are oppressing him, but his mother's voice breaking in checks him.

'Don't have any lovers for a long time, child,' she says, 'you are too young for such unsatisfactory toys. The longer you are without them, the happier you will be. They are more trouble than gratification.'

'I don't mean to have one,' says Lilian with a wise shake of her blonde head, 'for years and years. I was merely admiring Miss Beauchamp's taste.'

'Wise child!' says Cyril admiringly. 'Why didn't you arrive by moonlight, Lilian? I'm never in luck.'

'It didn't occur to me; in future I shall be more considerate. Are you fretting because you can't go to-night to meet your cousin? You see how insignificant you are; you would not be trusted on so important a mission. It

is only bad little wards *you* are sent to welcome.'

She laughs gaily as she says this; but Guy, who is listening, feels it is meant as a reproach to him.

'There are worse things than bad little wards,' says Cyril, 'if you are a specimen.'

'Do you think so? It is a pity everyone doesn't agree with you. No, Martin,' to the elderly servitor behind her chair, who she knows has a decided weakness for her, 'don't take away the ice pudding yet; I am very fond of it.'

'So is Florence. You and she, I foresee, will have a stand-up fight for it at least once a week. Poor cook! I suppose she will have to make two ice puddings instead of one for the future.'

'If there is anything on earth I love, it is an ice pudding.'

'Not better than me, I trust.'

'Far, far better.'

'Take it away instantly, Martin, Miss Chesney mustn't have any more; it don't agree with her.'

At this Martin smiles demurely and deferentially, and presents the coveted pudding to Miss Chesney, whereat Miss Chesney makes a little triumphant grimace at Cyril, and helps herself as she loves herself.'

Dinner is over. The servants—Oh! joy!—have withdrawn: everybody has eaten as much fruit as they feel is good for them. Lady Chetwoode looks at Lilian and half rises from her seat.

'It is hardly worth while your leaving us this evening, mother,' Guy says hastily; 'I must so soon be running away if I wish to catch the train coming in.'

'Very well'—reseating herself; 'we shall

break through rules, and stay with you for this one night. You won't have your coffee until you return?'

'No, thank you.' He is a little *distrait*, and is following Lilian's movements with his eyes, who has risen, thrown up the window, and is now standing upon the balcony outside, gazing upon the slumbering flowers, and upon the rippling, singing brooks in the distance—the only things in all creation that never seem to sleep.

After a while, tiring of inanimate nature, she turns her face inwards and leans against the window-frame, and, being in an idle mood, begins to pluck to pieces the flower that has rested during dinner upon her bosom.

Standing thus in the half light, she looks particularly fair, and slight, and childish:

> A lovely being, scarcely formed or moulded,
> A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.

'Some thought crossing Lady Chetwoode's mind born of the long and loving glance she has been bestowing upon Lilian, she says:

'How I detest fat people. They make me feel positively ill. Mrs. Boileau, when she called to-day, raised within me the keenest pity.'

'She is a very distressing woman,' says Guy, absently. 'One feels thankful she has no daughter.'

'Yes indeed, the same thought occurred to me. Though perhaps not fat now, she would undoubtedly show fatal symptoms of a tendency towards it later on. Now you, my dear Lilian, have happily escaped such a fate; you will never be fat.'

'I'm sure I hope not, if you dislike the idea so much,' says Lilian, amused, letting the ghastly remains of her ill-treated flower fall to the ground.

'If you only knew the misery I felt on hearing you were coming to us,' goes on Lady Chetwoode, 'dreading lest you might be inclined that way; not of course but that I was very pleased to have you, my dear child, but I fancied you large and healthy-looking, with a country air, red cheeks, black hair, and unbounded *gaucherie*. Imagine my delight, therefore, when I beheld you slim and self-possessed, and with your pretty yellow hair!'

'You make me blush, you cover me with confusion,' says Miss Chesney, hiding her face in her hands.

'Yes, yellow hair is my admiration,' goes on Lady Chetwoode, modestly; 'I had golden hair myself in my youth.'

'My dearest mother, we all know you were, and are the loveliest lady in creation,' says Guy, whose tenderness towards his mother is at all times a thing to be admired.

'My dear Guy, how you flatter,' says she, blushing a faint, sweet old blush that shows how mightily pleased she is.

'Do you know,' says Lilian, 'in spite of being thought horrid, I like comfortable-looking people? I wish I had more flesh upon my poor bones. I think,' going deliberately up to a glass and surveying herself with a distasteful shrug—'I think thin people have a meagre, gawky, hard look about them, eminently unbecoming. I rather admire Mrs. Mount-George, for instance.'

'Hateful woman!' says Lady Chetwoode, who cherishes for her an old spite.

'I rather admire her, too,' says Sir Guy, unwisely—though he only gives way to this opinion through a wild desire to help out Lilian's judgment.

'Do you?' says that young lady with exaggerated emphasis. 'I shouldn't have

thought she was a man's beauty. She is a little too—too—demonstrative, too *prononcée*.'

'Oh! Guy adores fat women,' says Cyril the incorrigible; 'wait till you see Florence—there is nothing of the "meagre, gawky, hard" sort about her. She has a decided leaning towards *embonpoint*.'

'And I imagined her quite slight,' says Lilian.

'You must begin then and imagine her all over again. The only flesh there isn't about Florence is fools' flesh. It is hardly worth while, however, your creating a fresh portrait, as the original,' glancing at his watch, 'will so soon be before you. Guy, my friend, you should hurry.'

Lilian returns to the balcony, whither Chetwoode's eyes follow her longingly. He rises reluctantly to his feet, and says to Cyril with some hesitation:

'You would not care to go to meet Florence?'

'I thank you kindly—no,' says Cyril with an expressive shrug, 'not for Joe! I shall infinitely prefer a cigar at home, and Miss Chesney's society—if she will graciously accord it to me.' This with a smile at Lilian, who has again come in and up to the table, where she is now eating daintily a showy peach, that has been lying neglected on its dish since dinner, crying vainly, 'who'll eat me, who'll eat me?'

She nods and smiles sweetly at Cyril as he speaks.

'I am always glad to be with those who want me,' she says, carefully removing the skin from her fruit; 'specially you, because you always amuse me. Come out and smoke your cigar, and I will talk to you all the time. Won't that be a treat for you?' with a little

low, soft laugh, and a swift glance at him from under her curling lashes that, to say the truth, is rather coquettish.

'There Guy, don't you envy me, with such a charming time before me?' says Cyril, returning her glance with interest.'

'No indeed,' says Lilian, raising her head and gazing full at Chetwoode, who returns her glance steadily, although he is enduring grinding torments all this time, and almost—*almost* begins to hate his brother. 'The last thing Sir Guy would dream of would be to envy you my graceless society. Fancy a guardian finding pleasure in the frivolous conversation of his ward! How could you suspect him of such a weakness?'

Here she lets her small white teeth meet in her fruit with all the airs of a little *gourmande*, and a most evident enjoyment of its flavour.

There is a pause.

Cyril has left the room in search of his cigar-case. Lady Chetwoode has disappeared to explore the library for her everlasting knitting. Sir Guy and Lilian are alone.

'I cannot remember having ever accused you of being frivolous, either in conversation or manner,' says Chetwoode presently in a low, rather angry tone.

'No?' says naughty Lilian with a shrug; 'I quite thought you had. But your manner is so expressive at times, it leaves no occasion for mere words. This morning when I made some harmless remark to Cyril, you looked as though I had committed murder, or something worthy of transportation for life at the very least.'

'I cannot remember that either. I think you purposely misunderstand me.'

'What a rude speech! Oh! if *I* had said that! But see how late it is'—looking at the

clock—'you are wasting all these precious minutes here that might be spent so much more—profitably with your cousin.'

'You mean you are in a hurry to be rid of me,' disdaining to notice her innuendo; 'go—don't let me detain you from Cyril and his cigar.'

He turns away abruptly, and gives the bell a rather sharp pull. He is so openly offended that Lilian's heart smites her.

'Who is misunderstanding now?' she says, with a decided change of tone. 'Shall you be long away, Sir Guy?'

'Not very,' icily. 'Truston, as you know, is but a short drive from this.'

'True.' Then with charmingly innocent concern, 'Don't you like going out so late?—you seem a little cross.'

'Do I?'

'Yes. But perhaps I mistake; I am always

making mistakes,' says Miss Lilian, humbly, 'I am very unfortunate. And you know what Ouida says, that "one is so often thought to be sullen when one is only sad." Are *you* sad?'

'No,' says Guy, goaded past endurance; 'I am not. But I should like to know what I have done that you should make a point at all times of treating me with incivility.'

'Are you speaking of me?'—with a fine show of surprise, and widely-opened eyes; 'what can you mean? Why, I shouldn't dare be uncivil to my guardian. I should be afraid. I should positively die of fright,' says Miss Chesney, feeling strongly inclined to laugh, and darting a little wicked gleam at him from her eyes as she speaks.

'Your manner'—bitterly—'fully bears out your words. Still I think—— Why doesn't Grainger bring round the carriage Am I to give the same order half-a-dozen times?'—this

to a petrified attendant who has answered the bell, and now vanishes, as though shot, to give it as his opinion downstairs that Sir Guy is in 'a h'orful wax!'

'Poor man, how you have frightened him!' says Lilian, softly. 'I am sorry if I have vexed you.' Holding out a small hand of amity —'Shall we make friends before you go?'

'It would be mere waste of time,' replies he, ignoring the hand, 'and besides, why should you force yourself to be on friendly terms with me?'

'You forget——' begins Lilian, somewhat haughtily, made very indignant by his refusal of her overture; but, Cyril and Lady Chetwoode entering at this moment simultaneously, the conversation dies.

'Now I am ready,' Cyril says, cheerfully. 'I took some of your cigars, Guy; they are rather better than mine; but the occasion is so

felicitous I thought it demanded it. Do you mind?'

'You can have the box,' replies Guy curtly.

To leave a suspected rival in full possession of the field, smoking one's choicest weeds, is not a thing calculated to soothe a ruffled breast.

'Eh, you're not ill, old fellow, are you?' says Cyril, in his laziest, most good-natured tones. 'The whole box! Come, my dear Lilian, I pine to begin them.'

Miss Chesney finishes her peach in a hurry and prepares to follow him.

'Lilian, you are like a baby with a sweet tooth,' says Lady Chetwoode. 'Take some of those peaches out on the balcony with you, child, you seem to enjoy them. And come to me to the drawing-room when you tire of Cyril.'

So the last thing Guy sees as he leaves the

room is Lilian and his brother armed with peaches and cigars on their way to the balcony; the last thing he hears is a clear, sweet ringing laugh that echoes through the house, and falls like molten lead upon his heart.

He bangs the hall-door with much unnecessary violence, steps into the carriage, and goes to meet his cousin in about the worst temper he has given way to for years.

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Half-past ten has struck. The drawing-room is ablaze with light. Lady Chetwoode, contrary to custom, is wide awake, the grey sock lying almost completed upon her lap. Lilian has been singing, but is now sitting silent with her idle little hands before her, while Cyril reads aloud to them decent extracts from the celebrated divorce case, now drawing to its unpleasant close.

'They ought to be here now,' says Lady

Chetwoode, suddenly, alluding not so much to the plaintiff, or the defendant, or the co-respondents, as to her eldest son, and Miss Beauchamp. 'The time is up.'

Almost as she says the words the sound of carriage wheels strikes upon the ear, and a few minutes later the door is thrown wide open and Miss Beauchamp enters.

Lilian stares at her with a good deal of pardonable curiosity. Yes, in spite of all that Cyril said, she is very nearly handsome. She is tall, *posée*, large and somewhat full, with rather prominent eyes. Her mouth is a little thin, but well shaped; her nose is perfect; her figure faultless. She is quite twenty-six (in spite of artificial aid), a fact that Lilian perceives with secret gratification

She walks slowly up the room, a small Maltese terrier clasped in her arms, and presents a cool, fresh cheek to Lady Chetwoode, as

though she had parted from her but a few hours ago. All the worry and fatigue of travel have not told upon her;—perhaps her maid and that mysterious closely locked little morocco bag in the hall could tell upon her;—but she looks as undisturbed in appearance and dress as though she had but just descended from her room, ready for a morning's walk.

'My dear Florence, I am glad to welcome you home,' says Lady Chetwoode affectionately, returning her chaste salute.

'Thank you, Aunt Anne,' says Miss Beauchamp in carefully modulated tones. 'I, too, am glad to get home. It was quite delightful to find Guy waiting for me at the station!'

She smiles a pretty ladylike smile upon Sir Guy as she speaks, he having followed her into the room. 'How d'ye do, Cyril?'

Cyril returns her greeting with due pro-

priety, but expresses no hilarious joy at her return.

'This is Lilian Chesney whom I wrote to you about,' Lady Chetwoode says, putting out one hand to Lilian. 'Lilian, my dear, this is Florence.'

The girls shake hands. Miss Beauchamp treats Lilian to a cold though perfectly polite stare, and then turns back to her aunt.

'It was a long journey, dear,' sympathetically says 'Aunt Anne.'

'Very. I felt quite exhausted when I reached Truston, and so did Fanchette; did you not, *ma bibiche*, my treasure?'—this is to the little white stuffy ball of wool in her arms, which instantly opens two pink-lidded eyes, and puts out a crimson tongue, by way of answer. 'If you don't mind, Aunt, I think I should like to go to my room.'

'Certainly, dear. And what shall I send you up?'

'A cup of tea please, and—er—anything else there is. Élise will know what I fancy; I dined before I left. Good-night, Miss Chesney. Good-night, Guy; and thank you again very much for meeting me'—this very sweetly.

And then Lady Chetwoode accompanies her upstairs, and the first wonderful interview is at an end.

'Well?' says Cyril.

'I think her quite handsome,' says Lilian, enthusiastically, for Guy's special benefit, who is sitting at a little distance glowering upon space. 'Cyril, you are wanting in taste.'

'Not when I admire you,' replies Cyril promptly. 'Will you pardon me, Lilian, if I go to see they send a comfortable and substantial supper to my cousin? Her appetite is all that her best friend could wish.'

So saying, he quits the room bent on some business of his own, that has very little to do, I think, with the refreshment of Miss Beauchamp's body.

When he has gone, Lilian takes up Lady Chetwoode's knitting and examines it critically For the first time in her life she regrets not having given up some of her early years to the mastering of fancy work; then she lays it down again, and sighs heavily. The sigh says quite distinctly how tedious a thing it is being alone in the room with a man who will not speak to one. Better, far better, be with a dummy, from whom nothing could be expected.

Sir Guy, roused to activity by this dolorous sound, crosses the room and stands directly before her, a contrite expression upon his face.

'I have behaved badly,' he says. 'I confess my fault; will you not speak to me, Lilian?' His tone is half laughing, half penitent.

'Not'—smiling—'until you assure me you have left all your ill-temper behind you at Truston.'

'I have. I swear it.'

'You are sure?'

'Positive.'

'I do hope you did not bestow it upon poor Miss Beauchamp?'

'I don't know, I'm sure. I hope not,' says Guy, lightly; and there is something both in his tone and words that restores Miss Chesney to amiability. She looks at him steadily for a moment, and then she smiles.

'I am forgiven?' asks Guy, eagerly taking courage from her smile.

'Yes.'

'Shake hands with me, then,' says he, holding out his own.

'You expect too much,' returns Lilian, recoiling. 'Only an hour ago, you refused to

take my hand; how then can I now accept yours?'

'I was a brute, nothing less!' declares he, emphatically. 'Yet, do accept it, I implore you.'

There is a good deal more meaning in his tone than even he himself is quite aware of. Miss Chesney either does not, or will not see it. Raising her head, she laughts out loud, a low, but thoroughly amused laugh.

'Any one listening would say you were proposing to me,' she says, mischievously; whereupon he laughs too, and seats himself upon the low ottoman beside her.

'I shouldn't mind,' he says; 'should you?'

'Not much. I suppose one must go through it some time or other.'

'Have you ever had a—proposal?'

'Why do you compel me to give you an answer that must be humiliating. No; I have

never had a proposal. But I dare say I shall have one or two before I die.'

'I dare say. Unless you will now accept mine'—jestingly—'and make me the happiest of men.'

'No, thank you. You make me such an admirable guardian, that I could not bear to depose you. You are now in a proud position (considering the ward you have)! do not rashly seek to better it.'

'Your words are golden. But all this time you are keeping me in terrible suspense. You have not yet quite made friends with me.'

Then Lilian places her hand in his.

'Though you don't deserve it,' she says severely, 'still——'

'Still you do accept me—it, I mean,' interrupts Guy, purposely, closing his fingers warmly over hers. 'I shall never forget that fact. Dear little hand!' softly caressing it,

'did I really scorn it an hour ago? I beg its pardon very humbly.'

'It is granted,' answers Lilian, gaily. But to herself she says: 'I wonder how often has he gone through all this before?'

Nevertheless, in spite of doubts on both sides, the truce is signed for the present.

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CHAPTER X.

How beautiful is the rain!
After the dust and heat.
To the dry grass, and the drier grain,
How welcome is the rain!—LONGFELLOW.

MISS CHESNEY, who, had she been born a man and a gardener, could have commanded any wages, is on her knees beside some green plants, busily hunting for slugs. These ravishers of baby flowers and innocent seedlings are Miss Chesney's especial abhorrence. It is in vain to tell her that they must be fed; that they, as well as the leviathan, must have their daily food; she declines to look upon their frequent depreda-

tions in any other light than as wanton mischief.

Upon their destruction she wastes so much of her valuable time that, could there be a thought in their small slimy, gelatinous bodies, they must look upon her as the fell destroyer of their race—a sort of natural enemy.

She is guiltless of gloves, and, being heated in the chase, has flung her hat upon the velvet sward beside her. Whereupon the ardent sun, availing of the chance, is making desperate love to her, and is kissing with all his might her priceless complexion. It is a sight to make a town-bred damsel weep aloud!

Miss Beauchamp sailing majestically towards this foolish maiden, with her diaphanous skirts trailing behind her, a huge hat upon her carefully arranged braids, and an enormous garden umbrella over all, looks with surprise, largely mingled with contempt, upon the kneel-

ing figure. She marks the soft beauty of the skin, the exquisite pencilling of the eyebrows, the rich colour on the laughing lips, and, marking, feels some faint anger at the reckless extravagance of the owner of these unpurchasable charms.

To one long aware of the many advantages to be derived from such precious unguents as crême d'Ispahan, velvetine, and Chinese rouge, is known also all the fear of detection arising from the daily use of them. And to see another richly and freely endowed by Nature with all the most coveted tints, making light of the gift, seems to such an one a gross impertinence, a miserable want of gratitude, too deep for comprehension.

Pausing near Lilian, with the over-fed Maltese panting and puffing beside her, Miss Beauchamp looks down upon her curiously, upon the roseleaf face, the little soiled hands,

the ruffled golden head, and calculates to a fraction the exact amount of mischief that may be done by the possession of so much youth and beauty.

The girl is far too pretty. There is really no knowing what irremediable harm she may not have done already!

'What a mess you are making of yourself!' says Florence, in a tone replete with ladylike disgust.

'I am rather,' says Lilian, holding aloft the small hand, on which five dusty fingers disport themselves, while she regards them contemplatively; 'but I love it, gardening I mean. I would have made a small fortune at flower shows, had I given my mind to it earlier; not a prize would have escaped me.'

'Everyone with an acre of garden thinks that,' says Miss Beauchamp.

'Do they?' smiling up at the white goddess

beside her. 'Well, perhaps so. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and a good thing too.'

'Don't you think you will be likely to get a sunstroke?' remarks Florence, with indifferent concern.

'No; I am accustomed to go about without my hat,' answers Lilian; 'of course as a rule I wear it, but it always gives me a feeling of suffocation; and as for a veil, I simply couldn't bear one.'

Miss Beauchamp, glancing curiously at the peach-like complexion beneath her, wonders enviously how she does it, and then reflects with a certain sense of satisfaction that a very little more of this mad tampering with Nature's gifts will create such havoc as must call for the immediate aid of the inestimable Rimmel and his fellows.

The small terrier awaking from the tuneful

snooze that always accompanies her moments of inactivity whether she be standing or lying, now rolls over to Lilian and makes a fat effort to lick her dear little Grecian nose. At which let no one wonder, as a prettier little nose was never seen. But Lilian is so far unsympathetic that she strongly objects to the caress.

'Poor Fanchette,' she says kindly, recoiling a little, 'you must forgive me, but the fact is I can't bear having my face licked. It is bad taste on my part, I know, and I hope you will grant me pardon. No, I cannot pet you either, because I think my earthy fingers would not improve your snowy coat.'

'Come away, Fanchette, come away, *petite*, directly; do you hear?' cries Miss Beauchamp in an agony, lest the scented fleece of her 'curled darling' should be defiled. 'Come to its own mistress then. Don't you see you are disturbing Lilian?'—this last as a mild apology

for the unaffected horror of her former tone.

So saying she gathers up Fanchette, and retires into the shaded shrubberies beyond her.

Almost as she disappears from view, Guy comes upon the scene.

'Why, what are you doing?' he calls out while yet a few yards from her.

'I have been shocking your cousin,' returns Lilian, laughing. 'I doubt she thinks me a horribly unladylike young woman. But I can't help that. See how I have soiled my hands,' holding up for his inspection her ten little grimy fingers.

'And done your utmost to ruin your complexion, all for the sake of a few poor slugs. What a bloodthirsty little thing you are!'

'I don't believe there is any blood in them,' says Lilian.

'Do come away. One would think there wasn't a gardener about the place. You will make yourself ill, kneeling there in the sun; and look how warm you are: it is a positive shame.'

'But I have preserved the lives, and the beauty, of all these little plants.'

'Never mind the plants. Think of your own beauty. I came here to ask you if you will come for a walk in the woods. I have just been there, and it is absolutely cool.'

'I should like to immensely,' springing to her feet; 'but my hands'—hesitating—'what am I to do with them? Shall I run in and wash them? I shan't be one minute.'

'Oh no!' hastily, having a wholesome horror of women's minutes, 'come down to the stream, and we will wash them there.'

This suggestion savouring of unconventionality, finds favour in Miss Chesney's eyes, and

they start, going through the lawn, for the tiny rivulet that runs between it and the longed-for woods.

Kneeling beside it, Lilian lets the fresh gurgling water trail through her fingers, until all the dust falls from them and floats away on its bosom; then reluctantly she withdraws her hands and, rising, looks at them somewhat ruefully.

'Now, how shall I dry them?' asks she, glancing at the drops of water that fall from her fingers, and glint and glisten like diamonds in the sun's rays.

'In your handkerchief,' suggests Guy.

'But then it would be wet, and I should hate that. Give me yours,' says Miss Chesney, with calm selfishness.

Guy laughs, and produces an unopened handkerchief in which he carefully, and, it

must be confessed, very tardily, dries her fingers one by one.

'Do you always take as long as that to dry your own hands?' asks Lilian, gravely, when he has arrived at the third finger of the second hand.

'Always!' without a blush.

'Your dressing, altogether, must take a long time?'

'Not so long as you imagine. It is only on my hands I expend so much care.'

'And on mine,' suggestively.

'Exactly so. Do you never wear rings?'

'Never. And for the very best reason.'

'And that?'

'Is because I haven't any to wear. I have a few of my mother's, but they are old-fashioned and heavy, and look very silly on my hands. I must get them reset.'

'I like rings on pretty hands, such as yours.'

'And Florence's. Yes, she has pretty hands, and pretty rings also.

'Has she?'

'What! Would you have me believe you never noticed them? Oh, Sir Guy, how deceitful you can be!'

'Now, that is just the very one vice of which I am entirely innocent. You wrong me. I couldn't be deceitful to save my life. I always think it must be so fatiguing. Most young ladies have pretty hands, I suppose; but I never noticed those of Miss Beauchamp, or her rings either, in particular. Are you fond of rings?'

'Passionately fond.' Laughing. 'I should like to have every finger and both my thumbs covered with them up to the first knuckle.'

'And nobody ever gave you one?'

'Nobody.' Shaking her head emphatically. 'Wasn't it unkind of them?'

With this remark Sir Guy does not coincide; so he keeps silence, and they walk on some yards without speaking. Presently Lilian, whose thoughts are rapid, finding the stillness irksome, breaks it.

'Sir Guy'——

'Miss Chesney.'

As they all call her 'Lilian' she glances up at him in some surprise at the strangeness of his address.

'Well, and why not,' says he, answering the unmistakable question in her eyes, 'when you call me "Sir Guy?" I wish you would not.'

'Why? Is it not your name?'

'Yes, but it is so formal. You call Cyril by his name, and even with my mother you have dropped all formality. Why are you

different with me? Can you not call me "Guy?"'

'Guy! Oh, I *couldn't*. Every time the name passed my lips I should faint with horror at my own temerity. What! call my guardian by his Christian name? How can you even suggest the idea? Consider your age and bearing.'

'One would think I was ninety,' says he rather piqued.

'Well, you are not far from it.' Teazingly. 'However, I don't object to a compromise. I will call you Uncle Guy if you wish it.'

'Nonsense!' indignantly. 'I don't want to be your uncle.'

'No? Then Brother Guy.'

'That would be equally foolish.'

'You won't, then, claim relationship with me?' In a surprised tone. 'I fear you look upon me as a *mauvais sujet*. Well, then'—with sudden inspiration—'I know what I shall do.

Like Esther Summerson, in "Bleak House," I shall call you "Guardian." There!' clapping her hands, 'is not that the very thing? Guardian you shall be, and it will remind me of my duty to you every time I mention your name. Or, perhaps'—hesitating—'"Guardy" will be prettier.'

'I wish I wasn't your guardian,' Guy says somewhat sadly.

'Don't be unkinder than you can help,' reproachfully. 'You won't be my uncle, or my brother, or my guardian? What is it, then, that you would be?'

To this question he could give a very concise answer, but does not dare do so. He therefore maintains a discreet silence, and relieves his feelings by taking the heads off three dandelions that chance to come in his path.

'Does it give you so very much trouble,

the guardianship of poor little me,' she asks, with a mischievous though charming smile, 'that you so much regret it?'

'It isn't that,' he answers slowly, 'but I fear you look coldly on me in consequence of it. You do not make me your friend, and that is unjust, because it was not my fault. I did not ask to be your guardian; it was your father's wish entirely. You should not blame me for what he insisted on.'

'I don't'—gaily—'and I forgive you for having acceded to poor papa's proposal; so don't fret about it. After all'—naughtily—'I dare say I might have got worse; you arn't half bad so far, which is wise of you, because I warn you I am an *enfant gâté*; and should you dare to thwart me I should lead you such a life as would make you rue the day you were born.'

'You speak as though it were my desire to thwart you.'

'Well, perhaps it is. At all events'—with a relieved sigh—'I have warned you, and now it is off my mind. By the bye, I was going to say something to you a few minutes ago when you interrupted me.'

'What was it?'

'I want you'—coaxingly—'to take me round by the Cottage, so that I may get a glimpse at this wonderful widow.'

'It would be no use; you would not see her.'

'But I might.'

'And if so what would you gain by it? She is very much like other women—she has only one nose, and not more than two eyes.'

'Nevertheless she rouses my curiosity. Why have you such a dislike to the poor woman?'

'Oh, no dislike,' says Guy, the more hastily in that he feels there is some truth in the accusation. 'I don't quite trust her—that is all.'

'Still, take me near the Cottage; *do*, now, Guardy,' says Miss Chesney, softly, turning two exquisite appealing blue eyes upon him, which of course settles the question. They instantly turn and take the direction that leads to the Cottage.

But their effort to see the mysterious widow is not crowned with success. To Miss Chesney's sorrow and Sir Guy's secret joy, the house appears as silent and devoid of life as though, indeed, it had never been inhabited. With many a backward glance and many a wistful look Lilian goes by, while Guy carefully suppresses all expressions of satisfaction and trudges on silently beside her.

'She must be out,' says Lilian, after a lengthened pause.

'She must be always out so,' says Guy, 'because she is never to be seen.'

'You must have come here a great many times to find that out,' says Miss Chesney, captiously; which remark puts a stop to all conversation for some time.

And indeed luck is dead against Lilian, for no sooner has she passed out of sight than Mrs. Arlington steps from her door, and, armed with a book and a parasol, makes for the small and shady arbour situated at the end of the garden.

But if Lilian's luck has deserted her, Cyril's has not. He has walked down here this evening in a rather desponding mood, having made the same journey vainly for the last three days, and now—just as he has reached despair—finds himself in Mrs. Arlington's presence.

'Good evening,' he says gaily, feeling rather elated at his good fortune, raising his hat.

'Good evening,' returns she, with a faint blush born of a vivid recollection of all that passed at their last meeting.

'I had no idea I should see you to-day,' says Cyril; which is the exact truth—for a wonder.

'Why? You always see me when you come round here, don't you?' says Mrs. Arlington; which is not the truth, she having been the secret witness of his coming many times, when she has purposely abstained from being seen.

'I hope,' says Cyril gently, 'you have forgiven me for having inadvertently offended you last—month.'

'Last week you mean!' in a surprised tone.

'Is it really only a week? How long it seems!' says Cyril. 'Are you sure it was only last week?'

'Quite sure.' With a slight smile. 'Yes, you are forgiven. Although I do not quite know that I have anything to forgive.'

'Well, I had my own doubts about it at the time,' says Cyril; 'but I have been carefully tutoring myself ever since into the belief that I was wrong. I think my principal fault lay in my expressing a hope that the air here was doing you good; and that—to say the least of it—was mild. By the bye, *is* it doing you good?'

'Yes, thank you.'

'I am glad of it, as it may persuade you to stay with us. What lovely roses you have! Is that one over there a "Gloire de Dijon"? I can scarcely see it from this, and I'm so fond of roses.'

'This, do you mean?' plucking one. 'No, it is a Marshal Niel.'

'Ah, so it is. How stupid of me to make

the mistake!' says Cyril, who in reality knows as much about roses as about the Man in the Iron Mask.

As he speaks two or three drops of rain fall heavily upon his face—one upon his nose, two into his earnest eyes; a large one finds its way cleverly between his parted lips. This latter has more effect upon him than the other three combined.

'It is raining,' he says, naturally but superfluously, glancing at his coat-sleeve for confirmation of his words.

Heavier and heavier fall the drops. A regular shower comes pattering from the heavens right upon their devoted heads. The skies grow black with rain.

'You will get awfully wet. Do go into the house,' Cyril says anxiously, glancing at her bare head.

'So will you,' with hesitation, gazing with

longing upon the distant arbour, towards which she is evidently bent on rushing.

'I daresay'—laughing—'but I don't much mind even if I do catch it before I get home.'

'Perhaps'—unwillingly, and somewhat coldly—'you would like to stand in the arbour until the shower is over?'

'I should,' replies Mr. Chetwoode with alacrity, 'if you think there will be room for two.'

There *is* room for two, but undoubtedly not for three. The little green bower is pretty but small, and there is only one seat.

'It is extremely kind of you to give me standing-room,' says Cyril politely.

'I am very sorry I cannot give you sitting-room,' replies Mrs. Arlington quite as politely, after which conversation languishes.

Cyril looks at Mrs. Arlington; Mrs. Arling-

ton looks at Marshal Niel, and apparently finds something singularly attractive in his appearance. She even raises him to her lips once or twice in a fit of abstraction; whereupon Cyril thinks that were he a marshal ten times over too much honour has been done him.

Presently Mrs. Arlington breaks the silence.

'A little while ago,' she says, 'I saw your brother and a young lady pass my gate. She seemed very pretty.'

'She is very pretty,' says Cyril, with a singular want of judgment in so wise a young man. 'It must have been Lilian Chesney, my brother's ward.'

'He is rather young to have a ward.'

'He is, rather.'

'He is older than you?'

'Unfortunately, yes, a little.'

'You, then, are very young?'

'Well, I'm not exactly an infant'—rather

piqued at the cool superiority of her tone—'I am twenty-six.'

'So I should have thought,' says Mrs. Arlington quietly, which assertion is as balm to his wounded spirit.

'Are your brother and his ward much attached to each other?' asks she idly, with a very palpable endeavour to make conversation.

'Not very much,' laughing, as he remembers certain warlike passages that have occurred between Guy and Lilian, in which the former has always had the worst of it.

'No? She prefers you, perhaps?'

'I really don't know; we are very good friends, and she is a dear little thing.'

'No doubt. Fair women are always to be admired. You admire her very much?'

'I think her pretty, but'—with an indescribable glance at the 'nut-brown locks'

before him, that says all manner of charming things—'her hair, to please me, is far too golden.'

'Oh! do you think so?' says Mrs. Arlington, surprised. 'I saw her distinctly from my window, and I thought her hair very lovely, and she herself one of the prettiest creatures I have ever seen.'

'That is strong praise. I confess I have seen others I thou ht better worthy of admiration.'

'You have been lucky, then.' Indifferently. 'When one travels one of course sees a great deal, and becomes a judge on such matters.'

'I didn't travel far to find that out.'

'To find what out?'

'A prettier woman than Miss Chesney.'

'No?' with cold unconcern and an evident want of interest in the subject. 'How lovely the flowers look with those little drops of rain

in their hearts—like a touch of sorrow in the very centre of their joy.'

'You like the country?'

'Yes, I love it. There is a rest, a calm about it that to some seems monotony, but to me is peace.'

A rather troubled shade falls across her face. An intense pity for her fills Cyril's breast, together with a growing conviction (which is not a pleasing one) that the dead and gone Arlington must have been a king amongst his fellows.

'I like the country well enough myself,' he says, 'but I hardly hold it in such esteem as you do. It is slow—at times unbearable. Indeed, a careful study of my feelings has convinced me that I prefer the strains of Albani or Nillsson to those of the sweetest nightingale that ever 'warbled at eve,' and the sound of the noisiest cab to the bleating of the melancholy lamb; while the most exquisite sunrise

that could be worked into poetry could not tempt me from my bed. Have I disgusted you?'

'I wonder you are not ashamed to give way to such sentiments.' With a short but lovely smile.

'One should never be ashamed of telling the truth, no matter how unpleasant it may be.'

'True.' With another smile more prolonged, and therefore lovelier, that lights up all her face and restores to it the sweetness and freshness of a child's.

Cyril, looking at her, forgets the thread of his discourse and says impulsively as though speaking to himself, 'It seems impossible.'

'What does?' Somewhat startled.

'Forgive me; I was again going to say something that would undoubtedly have brought down your heaviest displeasure on my head'

'Then don't say it,' says Mrs. Arlington, colouring deeply.

'I won't. To return to our subject: the country is just now new to you, perhaps. After a while you will again pine for society.'

'I do not think so. I have seen a good deal of the world in my time, but never gained anything from it except—sorrow.'

She sighs heavily; again the shadow darkens her face, and dims the beauty of her eyes.

'It must have caused you great grief losing your husband so young,' says Cyril gently, hardly knowing what to say.

'No, his death had nothing to do with the trouble of which I am thinking,' replies Mrs. Arlington with curious haste, a quick frown overshadowing her brow. Her fingers meet and clasp each other closely.

Cyril is silent, being oppressed with another growing conviction which completely

routs the first and leads him to believe the dead and gone Arlington a miserable brute, deserving of hanging at the very least. This conviction, unlike the first, carries consolation with it.

'I am sorry you would not let my mother call on you,' he says presently.

'Did Sir Guy say I would not see her?' asks she with some anxiety. 'I hope he did not represent me as having received her kind message with ingratitude.'

'No, he merely said you wished to see no one.'

'He said the truth. But then there are ways of saying things, and I should not like to appear rude. I certainly do not wish to see anyone, but for all that I should not like to offend your mother.'

There is not the very smallest emphasis on

the word 'your,' yet somehow Cyril feels flattered.

'She is not offended,' he says, against his conscience, and is glad to see his words please her. After a slight pause he goes on: 'Although I am only a stranger to you, I cannot help feeling how bad it is for you to be so much alone. You are too young to be so isolated.'

'I am happier so.'

'What! you would care to see no one?'

'I would care to see no one.' Emphatically, but with a sigh.

'How dreadfully in the way you must have found me!' says Cyril, straightening himself preparatory to departure. 'The rain, I see, is over.' (It has been for the last ten minutes.) 'I shall therefore restore you to happiness by taking myself away.'

Mrs. Arlington smiles faintly.

'I don't seem to mind you much,' she says

kindly, but with a certain amount of coldness. 'Pray do not think I have wished you away.'

'That is the first kind thing you have ever said to me,' says Cyril earnestly.

'Is it? I think I have forgotten how to make pretty speeches,' replies she calmly. 'See, the sun is coming out again. I do not think, Mr. Chetwoode, you need be afraid any longer of getting wet.'

'I'm afraid—I mean—I am sure not,' says Cyril absently. 'Thank you very much for the shelter you have afforded me. Would you think me very *exigeant* if I asked you to give me that rose you have been ill-treating for the last half-hour?'

'Certainly not,' says Mrs. Arlington hospitably; 'you shall have it if you care for it; but this one is damaged—let me get you a few others, fresher and sweeter.'

'No, thank you. I do not think you *could*

give me one either fresher or sweeter. Good evening.'

'Good-bye,' returns she, extending her hand; and, with the gallant Marshal firmly clasped in his hand, Cyril makes a triumphant exit.

He has hardly gone three yards beyond the gate that guards the widow's bower when he finds himself face to face with Florence Beauchamp, rather wet, and decidedly out of temper. She glances at him curiously, but makes no remark, so that Cyril hopes devoutly she may not have noticed where he has just come from.

'What a shower we have had!' he says, with a great assumption of geniality and much politeness.

'You do not seem to have got much of it,' replies she with lady-like irritability, looking with open disfavour upon the astonishing dryness of his clothes.

'No'—amiably—'I have escaped pretty

well. I never knew any cloth resist rain like this—doesn't even show a mark of it. I am sorry I cannot say the same for you. Your gown has lost a good deal of its pristine freshness; while, as for your feather, it is, to say the least of it, dejected.'

No one likes to feel oneself looking a guy. Cyril's tender solicitude for her clothes has the effect of rendering Miss Beauchamp angrier than she was before.

'Oh, pray don't try to make me more uncomfortable than I am,' she says sharply. 'I can imagine how unlovely I am looking. I detest the country: it means simply destruction to one's clothes and manners.' Pointedly. 'It has been raining ever since I came back from Shropshire.'

'What a pity you did come back just yet!' says Cyril, with quite sufficient pause to throw an unpleasant meaning into his words. 'As to

the country, I entirely agree with you; give me the town—it never rains in the town.'

'If it does one has a carriage at hand. How did you manage to keep yourself so dry, Cyril?'

'There is plenty of good shelter round here, if one chooses to look for it.'

'Evidently; very good shelter, I should say. One would almost think you had taken refuge in a house.'

'Then one would think wrong. Appearances, you know, are often deceitful.'

'They are indeed. What a beautiful rose that is!'

'Was, you mean. It has seen its best days. By the bye, when you were so near the Cottage why didn't you go in and stay there until the rain was over?'

'I shouldn't dream of asking hospitality from such a very suspicious sort of person as

this Mrs. Arlington seems to be,' Miss Beauchamp replies, with much affectation and more spitefulness.

'You are right—you always *are*,' says Cyril calmly. 'One should shun the very idea of evil. Extreme youth can never be too careful. Good-bye for the present, Florence; I fear I must tear myself away from you, as duty calls me in this direction.' So saying he turns into another path, preferring a long round to his home to a further *tête-à-tête* with the charming Florence.

But Florence has not yet quite done with him. His supercilious manner and that last harmless remark about 'extreme youth' rankles in her breast; so that she carries back to Chetwoode with her a small stone carefully hidden in her sleeve wherewith to slay him at a convenient opportunity.

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The same shower that reduces Miss Beauchamp to sullen discontent behaves with equal severity to Lilian, who reaches home, flushed and laughing, drenched and out of breath, with the tail of her gown over her shoulders and a handkerchief round her neck. Guy is with her; and it seems to Lady Chetwoode (who is much concerned about them) as though they had rather enjoyed than otherwise their enforced run.

Florence, who arrives some time after them, retires to her room, where she spends the two hours that must elapse before dinner in repairing all dilapidations in face and figure. At seven o'clock precisely she descends and gains the drawing-room as admirably dressed as usual, but with her good-humour still conspicuous by its absence.

She inveighs mildly against the evening's rain, as though it had been specially sent for

the ruin of her clothes and complexion, and says a good deal about the advantages to be derived from a town life, which is decidedly gracious, considering how glad she has been all these past years to make her home at Chetwoode.

When dinner is almost over she turns to Cyril and says with deliberate distinctness:

'Until to-day I had no idea you were acquainted with—the widow.'

There is no mistaking whom she means. The shot is well fired, and goes straight home. Cyril changes colour perceptibly and does not reply instantly. Lady Chetwoode looks at him with marked surprise. So does Lilian. So does Sir Guy. They all await his answer. Miss Beauchamp's petty triumph is complete.

'Had you not?' says Cyril. 'I wonder so amazing a fact escaped your knowledge.'

'Have you met Mrs. Arlington? You

never mentioned it, Cyril,' says Lady Chetwoode.

'Oh, yes,' says Miss Beauchamp, 'he is quite intimate there—aren't you, Cyril? As I was passing the Cottage to-day in a desperate plight, I met Cyril coming out of the house.'

'Not out of the house,' corrects Cyril calmly, having quite recovered his self-possession; 'out of the garden.'

'Was it? You were so enviably dry, in spite of the rain, I quite thought you had been in the house.'

'For once your usually faultless judgment led you astray. I was in an arbour where Mrs. Arlington kindly gave me shelter until the rain was over.'

'Was Mrs. Arlington in the arbour too?'

'Yes.'

'How very romantic! I suppose it was she gave you the lovely yellow rose you were

regarding so affectionately?' says Miss Beauchamp, with a low laugh.

'I always think, Florence, what a fortune you would have made at the Bar,' says Cyril thoughtfully; 'your cross-examinations would have had the effect of turning your witnesses grey. I am utterly convinced you would have ended your days on the Woolsack. It is a pity to see so much native talent absolutely wasted.'

'Not altogether wasted'—sweetly—'it has at least enabled me to discover how it was you eluded the rain this evening.'

'You met Mrs. Arlington before to-day?' asks Guy, who is half-amused and half-relieved, as he remembers how needlessly jealous he has been about his brother's attentions to Lilian. He feels also some vague doubts as to the propriety of Cyril's losing his heart to a woman of whom they know nothing; and his

singular silence on the subject of having made her acquaintance is (to say the least of it) suspicious. But, as Cyril has been in a chronic state of love-making ever since he got into his first tall hat, this doubt causes him but little uneasiness.

'Yes,' says Cyril in answer to his question.

'Is she as pretty as Sir Guy says?' asks Lilian, smiling.

'Quite as pretty, if not more so. One may always depend upon Guy's taste.'

'What a good thing it was you knew her! It saved you from that dreadful shower,' says Lilian good-naturedly, seeing intuitively he is vexed. 'We were not so fortunate—we had to run for our lives all the way home. It is a pity, Florence, you didn't know her also, as, being so near the house, you might have thrown yourself upon her hospitality for a little while.'

'I hardly think I see it in that light, drawls Florence affectedly. 'I confess I don't feel exactly ambitious about making the acquaintance of this Mrs.—er——'

'Arlington is her name,' suggests Cyril quietly. 'Have you forgotten it? My dear Florence, you really should see some one about your memory—it is failing every day.'

'I can still remember *some* things,' retorts Miss Beauchamp blandly.

By this time it has occurred to Lady Chetwoode that matters are not going exactly smoothly; whereupon she glances at Miss Beauchamp, then at Lilian, and finally carries them both off with her to the drawing-room.

'If there is one thing I detest,' says Cyril, throwing himself back in his chair, with an impatient movement, when he has closed the door upon them, 'it is a vindictive woman. I

pity the man who marries Florence Beauchamp.'

'You are rather hard upon her, are you not?' says Guy. 'I have known her very good-natured.'

'Lucky you! I cannot recall many past acts of kindness on her part.'

'So you met Mrs. Arlington?' says Guy carelessly.

'Yes; one day I restored to her her dog, and to-day she offered me shelter from the rain, simply because she couldn't help it. There our acquaintance rests.'

'Where is the rose she gave you?' asks Guy, with a laugh, in which after a moment's struggle, Cyril joins.

'Don't lose your heart to her, old boy,' Guy says lightly; but Cyril well knows he has meaning in what he says.

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CHAPTER XI.

They were two cousins almost like to twins:
And so they grew together, like two flowers
Upon one stem.—SHELLEY.

It was a babe, beautiful from its birth.—SHELLEY.

THE next day awakes calm and fair, and full of the rich ripeness that belongs to August. Lilian opening her blue eyes upon the world at half-past seven, calls her nurse, and being dressed rushes forth into the garden to drink in all the first sweet freshness of the day.

The dew still lingers upon lawn and blossom; the spiders' webs glisten like jewelled

nets in the dancing sunbeams; the exquisite opal flush of the morning sky has grown and spread and deepened, until all the heavens are tinged with warmest carmine.

There is 'splendour in the grass,' and 'glory in the flower,' and Lilian, flitting from bush to bush, enjoys everything to its utmost; she plucks two pale roses for her own bosom, and one, deep red and richly perfumed, to lay beside Lady Chetwoode's plate. This is a usual morning offering not to be neglected.

Just as she has made a careful choice, the breakfast bell rings loudly, and running at her quickest—most reckless—speed through the hall, barely succeeds in stopping herself as she comes up to Sir Guy at the door of the morning-room.

'Oh!' cries she with a little gasp, 'another moment and I should have been in your arms. I never saw you. Good morning, Guardy,' gaily.

'Good morning, my ward. I beg you to understand I could have welcomed that other moment. Why, what an early little bird you are. How long have you been abroad?'

'For hours and hours, half a day, while you—lazy man—were sound asleep. See what spoil I have gathered,' pointing to the heavy roses at her breast.

'Lovely indeed,' says Guy, who is secretly of opinion that the wild-rose complexion she has snatched from the amorous wind is by far the loveliest spoil of the two.

'And is not this sweet?' she says, holding up to his face the 'red, red rose,' with a movement full of grace.

'Very,' replies he, and stooping presses his lips lightly to her white hand.

'I meant the rose, not the hand,' says she, with a laugh and a faint blush.

'Did you? I thought the hand very much the sweetest of the two. Is it for me?'

'No!' says Miss Chesney with much emphasis; and telling him he is quite too foolish to be listened to any longer, she opens the door of the breakfast-room, and they both enter it together to find all the others assembled before them, and the post lying in the centre of the table. All, that is, that remains of it—namely, one letter for Lilian and two or three for Guy.

These latter being tinged with indigo are of an uninteresting description and soon read. Miss Chesney's on the contrary is evidently full of information. It consists of two whole sheets closely covered by a scrawling hand-writing that resembles nothing so much as the struggles of a dying fly.

When she has read it twice over carefully

—and with considerable difficulty—she lays it down, and looks anxiously at Lady Chetwoode.

'Auntie,' she begins with a bright blush and a rather confused air.

'Yes, dear?'

'This letter,' touching it, 'is from my cousin.'

'Yes—from your cousin? The lad who grew up with you at the Park? says Lady Chetwoode, with a kindly nod of comprehension.

Then ensues a pause. Somehow every one has stopped talking, and Lady Chetwoode has set down the tea-pot and turned to Lilian with an air full of expectancy. They all feel that something yet remains to be said.

Possessed with this idea, and seeing Lilian's hesitation, Lady Chetwoode says in her gentlest tones:

'Well, dear?'

'He is unhappy,' says Lilian, running one of her fingers up and down the table-cloth and growing more and more embarrassed, 'every year he used to come to the Park for his holidays, and now——'

'And now he cannot go to the Park—is that it?'

'Yes. A little while ago he joined his regiment, and now he has leave of absence, and he has nowhere to spend it except at Colonel Graham's, who is his guardian and his uncle, and he *hates* Colonel Graham,' says Lilian impressively, looking at Lady Chetwoode with appealing eyes.

'Poor boy,' says that kindest of women, 'I do not like to hear of his being unhappy. Perhaps, Lilian, you would wish——'

'I want you to ask him here,' says Lilian quickly and boldly, colouring furiously, and fixing her great honest eyes on Lady Chet-

woode. 'He said nothing about it, but I know he would like to be where I am.'

'My dear—of course,' says Lady Chetwoode with most unusual briskness for her, 'ask him instantly to come here as *soon* as you like, to stay as *long* as you like.'

'Auntie Nannie,' says Lilian, rising tumultuously from her chair, 'you are the dearest, kindest, best of women!' She presses her lips gently, although rapturously, to her auntie's cheek, after which she returns to her seat. 'Now I am thoroughly content,' she says, naïvely; 'I could not bear to picture Taffy wretched, and that old Colonel Graham is a downright Tartar!'

'"Taffy!" what an extraordinary name,' says Florence. 'Is it a fancy name?'

'No, it is, I am ashamed to say, a nickname. I believe he was christened James, but one day when we were both almost babies, he stole

from me my best doll, and squeezed the eyes out of it to see what lay behind, and I was very angry, and said he was a regular "Taffy" to do such a thing. You know the old rhyme?' turning to Lady Chetwoode with a blush and a light laugh,

> Taffy was a Welshman,
> Taffy was a thief,
> Taffy came to my house
> And stole a piece of beef.

There is a good deal more of it, quite as interesting, but of course you know it. Nurse laughed when I so christened him, and after that he was always called "Master Taffy" by the servants, and nothing else.'

'How nicknames do cling to one.'

'I don't believe I should know him by any other now. It suits him much better than his own, as he doesn't look the least in the world like a James.'

'How old is your cousin?' asks Florence with an eye to business.

'A year older than I am.'

'And that is—— ?'

'Nineteen.'

'Indeed. I should have thought you older than that.'

'He is very like me, and he is a dragoon!' says Lilian proudly. 'But I have never seen him since he was gazetted.'

'Then you have not seen him in his uniform?' says Guy.

'No. But he tells me,' glancing at her letter, 'he looks "uncommon jolly" in it.'

They all laugh. Even Florence condescends to be amused.

'When may we expect this hero?' asks Guy kindly.

'His leave begins next week,' answers Lilian, looking at Lady Chetwoode. 'If he

might come then, it would be such a comfort to him.'

'Of course he must come then,' says Lady Chetwoode. 'Do not let him lose a day of his precious leave. I remember when Guy was in the army how stingy they were about granting him a few days now and then.'

'The Mater's "few days" always meant eight months out of the twelve,' says Cyril laughing, 'and anything like the abuse she used to shower upon the Colonel because he didn't see it in the light that she did, was never heard. It is unfit for publication.'

'Archibald Chesney is coming here on the twenty-ninth,' says Guy. 'So you will be able to make choice between your two cousins.'

'Is Archibald coming?' surprised. 'But my choice is already made. No one shall ever get inside Taffy in my affections.'

'Thrice blessed Taffy,' says Cyril, 'see what it is to be a young and gallant plunger!'

'That wouldn't weigh with me,' says Lilian indignantly.

'Would it not?' asks Guy. 'I was hoping otherwise. I was a plunger once. What is the renowned Taffy's other name?'

'Musgrave,' says Lilian.

'A very pretty name,' remarks Miss Beauchamp, who has received an unexpected cheque by the morning's post, and is consequently in high good humour.

'I think so too,' returns Lilian.

'Five distinct blushes, and all about Taffy,' says Cyril meditatively. 'Happy Taffy! I have counted them religiously. Are you very much in love with him, Lilian?'

'"In love," nonsense,' laughing. 'If you only saw Taffy! (But,' with a glad smile, 'you soon will.) He never remembers anything

half-an-hour after he has said it, and besides,' scornfully, 'he is only a boy.'

'"Only a boy!" Was there ever such wilful waste! Such reckless, extravagant, woful waste! To throw away five priceless, divine blushes upon "only a boy!" Oh, that I were a boy! Perhaps, Lilian, when you come to know me longer I shall be happy enough to have one whole blush all to myself.'

'Be consoled,' says Miss Chesney saucily, 'I feel assured the longer I know you, the more reason I shall have to blush for you!'

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All through the day Miss Chesney's joy makes itself felt. She is thoroughly happy, and takes very good care everyone shall know it. She sings through the house, 'upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber,' gay as any lark; and inundates her nurse with vain

conjectures and interrogations. As, for example, whether she thinks Taffy will be much changed—and whether twelve months could possibly produce a respectable moustache—and if she really believes the fact of his being a full-blown dragoon will have a demoralising effect upon him.

'An' no doubt it will, hinny,' says Nurse, shaking her be-ribboned head very solemnly, 'I have no opinion of those soldiering ways myself. I fear me he will be growing wilder an' wilder every day.'

'Oh! if that's all!' says Miss Lilian with a relieved sigh, 'I am only afraid he will be growing steadier and steadier; and Taffy would be ruined if he gave himself airs. I can't endure dignified young men.'

'I don't think you need fret about that, my dear,' says Nurse with conviction. 'I never yet saw much signs of it about him.'

Having used up all Nurse's powers of conversation, Lilian goes on to Lady Chetwoode's boudoir, and finds out from her the room Taffy will be likely to occupy. Having inspected it, and brought up half the servants to change every article of furniture in the room into a different position, and given as much trouble as possible, and decided in her own mind the precise flowers she will place upon his dressing-table the morning of his arrival, she goes back to her auntie to tell her all she has done.

In fact, anyone so busy as Miss Chesney during all this day can scarcely be imagined. Her activity is surprising, and draws from Cyril the remark that she ought to go as hospital nurse to the wounded Turks, as she seems eminently fitted for an energetic life.

After luncheon she disappears for awhile, so that at last—though not for long—something like repose falls upon the house, which

sinks into a state of quietude only to be equalled by that of Verne's 'Van Tricassé.'

Miss Beauchamp is in her room, studying art; Cyril is walking with a heart full of hope towards the Cottage; Lilian is absent; Guy is upstairs with his mother, relating to her a new grievance anent poachers.

The lad now in trouble is an old offender, and Guy is puzzled what to do with him. As a rule all scamps have something interesting about them, and this Heskett is an unacknowledged favourite of Sir Guy's.

'Still I know I ought to dismiss him,' he says with a rather troubled air, and an angry, disappointed expression upon his face.

'He is young, poor lad,' says Lady Chetwoode.

'So he is, and his mother is so respectable. One hardly knows what to do. But this last is such a flagrant act, and I swore I would pack

him about his business if it occurred again. The fact is, I rather fancy the boy, and his wild ways, and don't like driving him to destruction. What shall I do, mother?'

'Don't do anything, my dear,' replies she, easily.

'I wish I could follow your advice'—smiling—'but unfortunately, if I let him off again I fear it will be a bad example to the others. I almost think——'

But what he thinks on this particular subject is never known.

There is a step outside the door—a step well known to one at least of those within—the 'soft frou-frou and rustle' of a woman's gown—and then the door is pushed very gently open and Lilian enters, with a curious little bundle in her arms.

'See what I've got,' she cries triumphantly, going over to Lady Chetwoode, and kneeling

down beside her, 'It's a baby, a real live baby! Look at it, Auntie, did you ever see such a beauty?'

'A baby,' says Lady Chetwoode fearfully, putting up her glasses, and staring cautiously down upon the rosy little fellow who in Lilian's encircling arms is making a desperate effort to assert his dignity, by sitting up and glaring defiantly around him.

'Yes, indeed; I carried him away when I found him, and have been playing with him for the last ten minutes in my own room. Then I began to think that you might like to see him, too.'

'That was very nice of you, my dear,' with some hesitation. 'It is certainly a very clean baby, but its dress is coarse. Whose baby is it?'

'He belongs to the laundress, I think,' says Lilian, 'but I'm not quite sure. I was

running through the kitchen when I saw him; isn't he a rogue?' as baby puts up a chubby hand to seize the golden locks so near him, 'look at his eyes, as big as saucers.'

She laughs delightedly, and baby laughs back at her again, and makes another violent jump at her yellow hair. Sir Guy, gazing intently at the pretty picture, at Lilian's flushed and lovely face, thinks he has never before seen her look half so sweet. Gay, merry, fascinating she always is, but with this new and womanly tenderness within her eyes, her beauty seems trebled. 'See, he wants my hair; is he not a darling?' she says, turning her fair face, rose-red with pleasure, up to Sir Guy.

'The laundress's child,—Lilian my *dear*!' says Lady Chetwoode in a faint tone of expostulation.

'Well, Jane was holding it in her arms, but

it can't be her's decidedly, because she hasn't got one.'

'Proof positive,' says Guy.

'Nor can it be cook's, because hers is grown up; so it must be the laundress's. Besides, she was standing by, and she looked so glad about it and so pleased when I took it, that I am sure she must be his mother. And of course she is proud of you, you bonny boy; so should I be, with your lovely face. Oh, look at his little fists, he is doubling them up just as though he were going to fight the world. And so he shall fight it, if he likes, a darling! Come, your mammy is pining for you.'

As she speaks she rises, but baby is loth to go yet awhile. He crows so successfully at Lady Chetwoode that he makes another conquest of her, and receives several gentle pats and a kiss from her, to Lilian's great gratification.

'But he is too heavy for you,' says her ladyship, addressing Lilian. 'Guy, ring the bell for one of the servants to take him down'

'And offend his mother mortally. No indeed, Auntie. We should get no clothes fit to wear next week if we committed such a *bêtise*. As I brought him up, so I shall carry him down, though, to do him justice, he *is* heavy. No servant shall touch him, the sweet boy,'—this to baby in a fond aside.

'I will carry him down for you,' says Guy, advancing slowly from the window where he has been standing.

'You! Oh, Sir Guy, fancy your condescending to touch a baby. Though, I forget,'—with a quick, mischievous look at him from her azure eyes, 'I believe there once was a baby you even professed to be fond of, but that was long ago. By the bye, what were you looking so stern about just as I came

in? Were you passing sentence of death on anyone?'

'Not quite so bad as that,' says Lady Chetwoode. 'It is another of those tiresome poachers. And this Heskett is certainly a very naughty boy. He was caught in the act last night, and Guy doesn't know what to do with him.'

'Let him off—forgive him,' says Lilian lightly, speaking to her guardian. 'You can't think how much pleasanter you will feel if you do.'

'I believe you are right,' says Guy laughing, 'and I dare say I should give him a last chance, but that I have passed my word. Give me that great heavy child, he looks as though he were weighing you down to the ground.'

'I think she holds him very prettily,' says Lady Chetwoode; 'I should like to have a picture of her just so.'

'Perhaps some day she will gratify you,' returns Guy encouragingly. 'Are you going to give me that *enfant terrible*, Miss Chesney, before you expire?'

'I am stronger than you think. And are you quite sure you can hold a baby?—that you won't let it fall? Take care now, and don't look as though you thought he would break. That will do. Auntie, don't you think he would make a capital nurse?'

'I hope that child will reach its mother alive,' says Auntie in a tone suggestive of doubt, after which Guy, escorted by Lilian, leaves the room.

Half-way down the stairs this brilliant procession meets Florence coming up.

'What is that?' she asks, stopping short in utter amazement, and staring blankly at the baby who is blinking his great eyes in a most uncompromising fashion, and is evidently de-

riving much refreshment from his little fat, red thumb.

'A baby,' says Guy gravely.

'A real live baby,' says Lilian, 'a real small duck,' giving the child's plump cheek a soft pinch over Guy's shoulder. 'Don't be frightened, Florence, he don't bite, you may give him a kiss in all safety.'

'Thanks,' says Florence, drawing her skirts closer round her, as though the very idea has soiled her garments. 'I don't care about kissing promiscuous babies. Really, Guy, if you only knew how ridiculous you look, you would spare yourself the humiliation of being so seen by your servants.'

'Blame Lilian for it all,' returns Guy, 'I know I shall blush myself to death if I meet any of the women!'

'I think Sir Guy never before looked so interesting,' says Miss Chesney, who is making

frantic play all this time with the baby; but its mood has changed, and now her most energetic efforts are received—not with smiles—but with stolid indifference and unblinking contempt by the young gentleman in arms.

'I cannot say I agree with you,' Miss Beauchamp says with much subdued scorn, 'and I do not think it is kind to place anyone in a false position.'

She lets a little disdainful angry glance fall upon Lilian—who unfortunately does not profit by it, as she does not see it—and sweeps up the stairs to her aunt's apartments, while Guy (who is not to be sneered out of his undertaking) stalks on majestically to the kitchen followed by Lilian, and never pauses until he places the chubby little rogue he carries in its mother's arms—who eventually turns out to be the laundress.

'I am not a judge,' he says to this young

woman, who is curtseying profusely, and is actually consumed with pride, 'but Miss Chesney has declared your son to be the loveliest child in the world, and I always agree with Miss Chesney—for reasons of my own.'

'Oh! thank you, Sir Guy—I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, Miss Chesney,' says the laundress, turning the colour of a full-blown peony, through excitement.

'What is his name?' asks Lilian, giving the boy a last fond poke with her pretty slender finger.

'Abiram, Miss,' replies the mother, which name much displeases Lilian, who would have liked to hear he was called Alaric, or Lancelot, or any other poetical appellation suitable for the most beautiful child in the world.

'A very charming name,' says Guy gravely, and having squeezed half a sovereign into the

little fellow's fat hand, he and Lilian go through the passages into the open air.

'Guardy,' says Lilian, 'what is a "promiscuous baby?"'

'I wish I knew,' replies he, 'I confess it has been puzzling me ever since. We must ask Florence when we go in.'

Here they both laugh a little, and stroll on for a time in silence. At length, being prompted thereto by her evil genius—Lilian says:

'Tell me, who is the Heskett you and Auntie were talking about just now?'

'A boy who lives down in the hollow beneath Leigh's farm. A dark boy we met one day at the end of the lawn—you remember him?'

'A lad with great black eyes, and a handsome face? with just a little *soupçon* of wickedness about him? of course I do. Oh! I like

that boy. You must forgive him Sir Guy, or I shall be unhappy for ever.'

'Do you know him?'

'Yes, well. And his mother too; she is a dear old thing, and but that she has an undeniable penchant for tobacco, would be perfection.'

'Guardy, you *must* forgive him.'

'My dear child, I can't.'

'Not when I ask you?' in a tone of purest astonishment.

'Not even then. Ask me something else—in fact anything—and I will grant it, but not this.'

'I want nothing else,' coldly. 'I have set my heart on freeing this poor boy, and you refuse me; and it is my first request.'

'It is always your first request, is it not?' he says, smiling a rather troubled smile. 'Yesterday——'

'Oh! don't remind me of what I may have

said yesterday,' interrupts Miss Chesney impatiently; 'think of to-day! I ask you to forgive Heskett—for my sake.'

'You should try to understand all that would entail,' speaking the more sternly in that it makes him positively wretched to say her nay; 'if I were to forgive Heskett this time, I should have every second man on my estate a poacher.'

'On the contrary, I believe you would make them all your devoted slaves.

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
> It droppeth, as the gentle dew from heaven,
> Upon the place beneath; it is twice bless'd.

You are straining yours. Why not pardon the boy generously and make him happy?'

'I have said I would not, and even you can hardly think it right that I should break my word.'

'No, you would rather break his mother's

heart!' By this time the spoiled Lilian has quite made up her mind to have her own way, and is ready to try any means to gain it. 'Your word!' she says disdainfully, 'if you are going to emulate the Medes and Persians, of course there is no use in my arguing with you. You ought to be an ancient Roman; even that detestable Brutus might be considered soft-hearted when compared with you.'

'Sneering, Lilian, is a habit that should be confined to those old in sorrow or worldly wisdom; it sits badly on such lips as yours.'

'Then why compel me to indulge in it? Give me my way in this one instance, and I will be good, and will probably never sneer again.'

'I cannot.'

'Then don't!' naughtily, made exceeding wroth by (what she is pleased to term) his obstinacy. 'I was foolish in thinking I could

influence you in any way. Had Florence asked you, you would have said yes instantly.'

'Florence would never have asked me to do anything so unreasonable.'

'Of course not, Florence never does wrong in your eyes! It is a pity everyone else does not regard her as favourably as you do.'

'I think everyone thinks very highly of her,' angrily.

'Do you? It probably pleases you to think so. I, for one, do not.'

'There is a certain class of people whose likes and dislikes cannot possibly be accounted for,' says Guy somewhat bitterly. 'I think you would find a difficulty in explaining to me your vehement antipathy towards Miss Beauchamp. You should remember "unfounded prejudices bear no weight."'

'That sounds like one of Miss Beauchamp's

own trite remarks,' says Lilian with a disagreeable laugh. 'Did you learn it from her?'

To this Chetwoode makes no reply, and Lilian, carried away by resentment at his open support of Florence, and by his determination not to accede to her request about young Heskett, says passionately:

'Why should you lose your temper about it?' (it is her own temper that has gone astray). 'It is all not worth a quarrel. Anyone may plainly see how hateful I am to you. In a thousand ways you show me how badly you think of me. You are a petty tyrant. If I could leave your house where I feel myself unwelcome—at least so far as *you* are concerned—I would gladly do so.'

Here she stops, more from want of breath than eloquence.

'Be silent,' says Guy, turning to confront

her, and thereby showing a face as pale, as hers is flushed with childish rage and bafflement. 'How dare you speak like that!' Then, changing his tone, he says quietly, 'You are wrong, you altogether mistake. I am no tyrant; I do what is just, according to my own conscience. No man can do more. As to what else you may have said, it is *impossible* you can feel yourself unwelcome in my house. I do not believe you feel it.'

'Thank you,' still defiant, though in truth she is a little frightened by his manner, 'that is as much as to say I am telling a lie, but I do believe it all the same. Every day you thwart and disappoint me in one way or another, and you know it.'

'I do not indeed. It distresses me much that you should say so. So much, that against my better judgment I give in to you in this matter of Heskett, if only to prove to you how

you wrong me when you say I wish to thwart you. Heskett is pardoned.'

So saying he turns from her abruptly, and half contemptuously, and striking across the grass, makes for a path that leads indirectly to the stables.

When he has gone some yards it occurs to Miss Chesney that she feels decidedly small. She has gained her point, it is true, but in a sorry fashion, and one that leaves her discontented with her success. She feels that had he done rightly he would have refused to bandy words with her at all upon the subject, and he would not have pardoned the reprehensible Heskett; something in his manner, too, which she chooses to think domineering, renders her angry still, together with a vague, uneasy consciousness that he has treated her throughout as a child and given in to her merely because it is a simpler matter to surrender

one's judgment than to argue with foolish youth.

This last thought is intolerable. A child indeed! She will teach him she is no child, and that women may have sense although they have not reached the admirable age of six-and-twenty.

Without further thought she runs after him, and overtaking him just as he turns the corner, says very imperiously, with a view to sustaining her dignity:

'Sir Guy, wait, I want to speak to you.'

'Well,' he says, stopping dead short, and answering her in his iciest tones. He barely looks at her, his eyes, having once met hers, wander away again without an instant's lingering, as though they had seen nothing worthy of attention. This plain ignoring of her charms is bitter to Miss Chesney.

'I do not want you to forgive that boy

against your will,' she says haughtily. 'Take back your promise.'

'Impossible! You have made me break my word to myself, nothing shall induce me to break my word to you. Besides, it would be unfair to Heskett. If I were to dismiss him now I should feel as though I had wronged him.'

'But I will not have his pardon so.'

'What!'—scornfully—'after having expended ten minutes in hurling at me some of the severest eloquence it has ever been my fate to listen to, all to gain this Heskett's pardon, you would now have it rescinded! Am I to understand so much?'

'No—but I hate ungraciousness.'

'So do I'—meaningly—'even more than I hate abuse.'

'Did I abuse you?'

'I leave you to answer that question.'

'I certainly,' with some hesitation, 'said you were a tyrant.'

'You did,' calmly.

'And that——'

'Do not let us go over such distasteful ground again,' interrupts he, impatiently; 'you said all you could say—and you gained your object. Does not even that satisfy you?'

'I wish I had never interested myself in the matter,' she says, angrily, vexed with herself, and with him, and with everything.

'Perhaps your wisdom would have lain in that direction,' returns he, coolly. 'But as you did interest yourself, and as victory lies with you, you should be the one to rejoice.'

'Well, I don't,' she says impulsively. And then she looks at him in a half defiant, half penitent, wholly charming way, letting her large soft eyes speak for her, as they rest full upon his face. There is something in her fresh

young beauty almost irresistible. Guy, with an angry sigh, acknowledges its power, and going nearer to her takes both her clasped hands in his.

'What a bad-tempered little girl you are,' he says, in a jesting tone, that is still full of the keenest reproach. 'Am I as bad as Brutus and all those terrible Medes and Persians? I confess you made me tremble when you showered upon me all those awful comparisons.'

'No, no, I was wrong,' she says hastily, twining her small fingers closely around his; then very softly, 'you are always forgiving me, are you not? But yet—tell me, Guardy—are you not really glad you have pardoned that poor Heskett? I cannot be pleased about it myself so long as I think I have only wrung your promise from you against your will. Say you are glad if only to make me happy.'

'I would do anything to make you happy —anything,' he says in a strange tone, reading anxiously her lovely *riante* face, that shows no faintest trace of such tenderness as he would fain see there; then altering his voice with an effort, 'Yes, I believe I am glad,' he says, with a short laugh; 'your intercession has removed a hateful duty from my shoulders.'

'Where is the boy? Is he locked up, or confined anywhere?'

'Nowhere. I never incarcerate my victims,' with a slight trace of bitterness still in his manner. 'He is free as air, in all human probability poaching at this present moment.'

'But if he knows there is punishment in store for him, why doesn't he make his escape?'

'You must ask him that, because I cannot answer the question. Perhaps he does not consider me altogether such a fiend as you do,

and may think it likely I will show mercy at the last moment.'

'Or perhaps,' says Lilian, 'he has made his escape long ago.'

'I don't think so. Indeed I am almost sure if you look straight along that field' —pointing in a certain direction—'you will see the young gentleman in question calmly smoking the pipe of peace upon a distant wall.'

'It is he,' says Lilian in a low tone, after a careful examination of the youthful smoker; 'how little he seems to fear his fate.'

'Yes, just fancy how lightly he views the thought of falling into the clutches of a monster!' remarks Chetwoode, with a mocking smile.

'I think you are a little hard on me,' says Lilian, reproachfully.

'Am I?' carelessly, preparing to leave her,

'if you see that promising *protégé* of yours, Lilian, you can tell him from me, he is quite at liberty to carry on his nightly games as soon as he pleases. You have no idea what a solace that news will be to him; only, if you have any regard for him, advise him not to be caught again.'

So saying he leaves her and continues his interrupted march to the stables.

When Miss Chesney has spent a moment or two, inveighing silently against the hardness and uncharitableness of men in general, and Sir Guy Chetwoode in particular, she accepts the situation, and presently starts boldly for the hollow in which lies the modest homestead of the venerable Mrs. Heskett.

The unconscious cause of the battle royal that has just taken place, has evidently finished his pipe and lounged away through the woods, as he is nowhere to be seen. And Miss

Chesney makes up her mind, with a view to killing the time that must elapse before dinner, to go straight to his mother's cottage, and by proclaiming Sir Guy's leniency, restore peace to the bosom of that ancient dame.

And as she walks she muses on all that has passed between herself and her guardian during the last half hour. After all, what did she say that was so very bad? She had certainly compared him to Brutus, but what of that? Brutus in his day was evidently a shining light amongst his people, and, according to the immortal Pinnock, an ornament to his sex. Suppose he did condemn his only son to death, what did that signify in a land where the deed was looked upon as meritorious? Weak-minded people of the present day might call him an old brute for so doing, but there are two sides to every question, and no doubt the young man was a

regular nuisance at home, and much better out of the way.

Then again she had likened him to the Medes and Persians, and why not? Who should say the Medes and Persians were not thoroughly respectable gentlemen, polished and refined; and though in this case again there might be some who would prefer the manners of a decent English gentleman to those of the present Shah, that is no reason why the latter should be regarded so ignominiously.

She has reached this highly satisfactory point in her argument when a body dropping from a tree near her, almost at her feet, startles her rudely from her meditations.

'Dear me!' says Lilian with much emphasis, and then knows she is face to face with Heskett.

He is a tall lad, brown-skinned as an Italian, with eyes and hair of gipsy dye. As

he stands before Lilian now, in spite of his daring nature, he appears thoroughly abashed, and with his eyes lowered, twirls uneasily between his hands the rather greasy article that usually adorns his brow.

'I beg your pardon, Miss,' he says slowly; 'but might I say a word to you?'

'I am sorry to hear such bad accounts of you, Heskett,' says Miss Chesney in return, with all the airs of a Dean and Chapter.

'Sir Guy has been telling you, Miss?' says the lad eagerly, 'and it is about my trouble I wanted to see you. They say you have great weight with the baronet, Miss, and once or twice you spoke kindly to me, and I thought, maybe, you would say a word for me.'

'You are mistaken, I have no influence,' says Lilian, colouring faintly. 'And besides, Heskett, there would be little use in speaking for you, as you are not be trusted.'

'I am, Miss Chesney, I am indeed, if Sir Guy would only try me again. I don't know what tempted me last night, but I got my lesson then, and never again I swear, Miss——'

Here a glance at Lilian's face checks further protestations. She is not looking at him; her gaze is concentrated upon the left pocket of his coat, though, indeed, there is little worthy of admiration in the cut of that garment. Following the direction of her eyes, Heskett's fall slowly, slowly, until at length they fasten upon the object that has so attracted her.

Sticking up in that luckless left pocket so as plainly to be seen, is a limp and rather draggled brown wing, the undeniable wing of a young grouse.

'Heskett,' says Lilian, severely, 'what have you been doing?'

'Nothing, Miss,' desperately.

'Heskett,' still more severely, and with just a touch of scorn in her tone. 'Speak the truth; what have you got in your pocket?'

'It's just a grouse then,' says the boy defiantly, producing the bonny brown bird in question.

'And a fat one,' supplements Lilian. 'Oh! Heskett, when you know the consequences of poaching, how can you do it?'

''Tis because I do know it'—recklessly—'it's all up with me this time, because the baronet swore he'd punish me next time I was caught, and he never breaks his word. So I thought, Miss, I'd have a last fling whatever came of it.'

'But it isn't "all up" with you,' says Lilian. 'I have spoken to Sir Guy, and he has promised to give you one more chance. But I cannot speak again, Heskett, and if you

still persist in your evil ways I shall have spoken in vain.'

'You spoke for me?' exclaims he, incredulously.

'Yes. But I fear I have done no good.'

The boy's eyes seek the ground.

'I didn't think the likes of you would care to say a kind word for such as me—and without the asking,' he says huskily. 'Look here, Miss Chesney, if it will please you, I swear I will never again snare a bird.'

'Oh! Heskett, will you promise really?' returns Lilian, charmed at her success, 'and can I trust you? You know you gave your word before to Sir Guy.'

'But not to you, Miss. Yes, I will be honest to please you. And indeed, Miss Chesney, when I left home this morning I never meant to kill a thing. I started with

a short oak stick in my hand, quite innocent like, and up by the bit of heath yonder this young one run across my path; I didn't seek it, and may bad luck go with the oak stick, for before I knew what I meant, it flew from me, and a second later the bird lay dead as mutton. Not a stir in it. I was always a fine shot, Miss, with a stick or a stone,' says the accomplished Heskett, regarding his grouse with much pride; 'Will you have it, Miss?' he says then, holding it out to her.

'No, thank you,' loftily, 'I am not a receiver of stolen goods; and it is stolen, remember that.'

'I suppose so, Miss. Well, as I said before, I will be honest now to please you, you have been so good to me.'

'You should try to please some one higher,' says Lilian with a solemnity that in her is sweeter than it is comical.

'Nay then, Miss—to please you first, if I may.'

'Tell me,' says Lilian, shifting ground as she finds it untenable, 'why do you never come to church?'

'It's so mighty dull, Miss.'

'You shouldn't find it so. Come and say your prayers, and afterwards you may find it easier to be good. You should not call church dull,' with a little reproving shake of the head.

'Do *you* never find it stupid, Miss Chesney?' asks Heskett with all diffidence.

Lilian pauses. This is a home thrust, and her innate honesty prevents the reply that trembles on her lips. She *does* find it very stupid now and then.

'Sometimes,' she says with hesitation, 'when Mr. Austen is preaching I cannot say I think it quite as interesting as it might be—still——'

'Oh! as for him,' says Heskett with a grin,

'he ought to be shot, Miss, begging your pardon, that's what he ought. I never see him I don't wish he was a rabbit snug in one o' my snares as was never known to fail. Wouldn't I wring his neck when I caught him—may be not! comin' around with his canting talk, as though he was the Archbishop hisself.'

'How dare you speak of your clergyman in such a way?' says Lilian shocked; 'you are a bad, bad boy, and I am very angry with you.'

'Don't then, Miss Chesney,' piteously; 'I ask your pardon humbly, and I'll never again speak of Mr. Austen if you don't like. But he do aggravate awful, Miss, and frightens the life out o' mother, because she do smoke a bit of an evenin', and it's all the comfort she have, poor soul. There's the Methody parson below, even he's a better sort, though he do snivel horrid. But I'll do anything to please you, Miss, an' I'll come to church next Sunday.'

'Well, mind you do,' says Lilian, dismissing him with a gracious nod.

So Heskett departs much exercised in mind and in the lowest spirits, being full of vague doubts. Yet with a keen consciousness that by his promise to Miss Chesney he has forfeited his dearest joy, and that from him the glory of life has departed. No more poaching, no more snaring, no more midnight excursions fraught with delicious danger; how is he to get on in future, with nothing to murder but time?

Meanwhile Miss Chesney coming home flushed with victory encounters Florence in the garden wandering gracefully amongst the flowers, armed as usual with the huge umbrella, the guardian of her dear complexion.

'You have been for a walk?' she asks Lilian with astonishing *bonhomie*. 'I hope it was a pleasant one.'

'Very, thank you.'

'Then you were not alone. Solitary walks are never pleasant.'

'Nevertheless mine was solitary.'

'Then Guy did not go with you?' somewhat hastily.

'No. He found he had something to do in the stables,' Lilian answers shortly.

Miss Beauchamp laughs, a low, soft, irritating laugh.

'How stupid Guy is,' she says. 'I wonder it never occurs to him to invent a new excuse; whenever he wants to avoid doing anything unpleasant to him, he has always some pressing business connected with the stables to take him away. Have you not noticed it?'

'I cannot say I have. But then I have not made a point of studying his eccentricities. Now you have told me this one I daresay I shall remark it in future. You see,' with a slight smile, 'I hold myself in such good

esteem, that it never occurred to me others might find my company disagreeable.'

'Nor do they, I am sure'—politely—'but Guy is so peculiar, at times positively odd.'

'You amuse me more and more every moment. I have always considered him quite a rational being—not in the least madder than the rest of us. I do hope the new moon will have no effect upon him.'

'Ah! you jest,' languidly. 'But Guy does hold strange opinions, especially about women. No one, I think, quite understands him but me. We have always been so—fond, of each other, he and I.'

'Yes? Quite like brother and sister I suppose? It is only natural.'

'Oh! *no*,' emphatically. Her voice taking a soft intonation full of sentimental meaning, 'not in the very *least* like brother and sister.'

'Like what then?' asks Lilian, somewhat sharply for her.

'How downright you are,' says Florence with a little forced laugh, and a modest drooping of her white lids; 'I mean, I think a brother and sister are hardly so necessary to each other's happiness as—as we are to each other, and have been for years. To me, Chetwoode would not be Chetwoode without Guy, and I fancy—I am sure—it would scarcely be home to Guy without me.' This with a quiet conviction not to be shaken. 'Perhaps you can see what I mean? though indeed,' with a smile, 'I hardly know myself what it is I *do* mean.'

'Ah!' says Lilian, a world of meaning in her tone.

'The only fault I find with him,' goes on Florence in the low, prettily modulated tone she always adopts, 'is, that he is rather a flirt.

I believe he cannot help it, it is second nature to him now. He adores pretty women, and at times his manner to them is rather—er—caressing. I tell him it is dangerous. Not perhaps that it makes much difference now-a-days, does it? when women have learned to value attentions exactly at what they are worth. For my own part I have little sympathy with those foolish Ariadnês, who spend their lives bemoaning the loss of their false lovers. Don't you agree with me?'

'Entirely. Utterly,' says Lilian in a curious tone that might be translated any way. 'But I cannot help thinking Fortune very hard on the poor Ariadnês. Is that the dressing-bell? How late it has grown! I am afraid we must go in if we wish to be in time for dinner.'

Miss Beauchamp being possessed with the same fear, they enter the house together appar-

ently in perfect amity with each other, and part in peace at their chamber doors. Lilian even bestows a little smile upon her companion as she closes hers, but it quickly changes into an unmistakable little frown as the lock is turned. A shade falls across her face, an impatient pucker settles comfortably upon her forehead as though it means to spend some time there.

'What a hateful girl that is!' Lilian says to herself, flinging her hat with a good deal of vehemence on to the bed (where it makes one desperate effort to range itself and then rolls over to the floor at the other side), and turning two lovely wrathful eyes towards the door, as though the object of her anger were still in sight. 'Downright detestable! and quite an old maid; not a doubt of it. Women close on thirty are always so spiteful!'

Here she picks up the unoffending hat, and almost unconsciously straightens a damaged

bow while her thoughts still run on passionately.

So Sir Guy 'adores pretty women.' By the by it was a marvellous concession on Miss Beauchamp's part to acknowledge her as such, for without doubt all that kindly warning was meant for her.

Going up to her glass Lilian runs her fingers through the rippling masses of her fair hair, and pinches her soft cheeks cruelly until the red blood rushes upwards to defend them, after which, she tells herself, even Florence could scarcely have said otherwise.

And does Miss Beauchamp think *herself* a 'pretty woman'? and does Sir Guy 'adore *her*'? She said he was a flirt. But is he? Cyril is decidedly given that way, and some faults run in families. Now she remembers certain lingering glances, tender tones, and soft innuendoes meant for her alone, that might be

placed to the account of her guardian. She smiles somewhat contemptuously as she recalls them. Were all these but parts of his 'caressing' manner? Pah! what a sickening word it is.

She blushes hotly, until for a full minute she resembles the heart of a red, red rose. And for that minute she positively hates her guardian. Does he imagine that she—*she*—is such a baby as to be flattered by the attentions of any man, especially by one who is the lover of another woman? for has not Florence both in words and manner almost claimed him as her own? Oh, it is too abominable. And——

But never mind, wait, and when she has the opportunity, won't she show him, that's all!

What she is to show him, or how, does not transpire. But this awful threat, this carefully disguised, and therefore sinister menace, is evidently one of weight, because it adds yet a deeper crimson to Miss Chesney's cheeks, and

brings to life a fire within her eyes, that gleams and sparkles there unrebuked.

Then it quietly dies, and Nurse entering finds her little mistress again calm, but unusually taciturn, and strangely forgetful of her teasing powers.

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